

FIFTY EIGHT  
SERMONS

Preached out of the

FIRST LESSONS  
OF EVERY  
SUNDAY *in the* YEAR,

*At Evening Prayer.*

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By WILLIAM READING, M. A.  
Keeper of the LIBRARY at *Sion-College.*

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VOL. IV. 3<sup>d</sup> L<sup>g</sup>

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LONDON:

Printed by J. WATTS, for the AUTHOR.

MDCCLXXX.





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VOL. IV.

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# THE TEXTS

## Of the FOURTH VOLUME.

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### SERMON XXXII. On the Seventh Sunday after TRINITY.

- 2 Sam. xxiv. 10. *And David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people: and David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.*

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- 1 Kings xvii. 24. *And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.*

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- 1 Kings xxii. 35. *And the battel increased that day; and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even.*

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### SERMON XXXVI. On the Eleventh Sunday after TRINITY.

- 2 Kings ix. 1, 2, 3. *And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins,*

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loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramoth-Gilead. And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber. Then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not.

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At St. Alphage, Octob. 18. 1724. at the Opening of the Church after Repairs, begun by a Legacy of Mrs. Christian Ruffel.

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## A P P E N D I X.

### SERMON on CHRISTMAS-DAY.

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All preached at St. Alphage and St. Michael's Crooked-Lane, LONDON.



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# SERMON XXXII.

*On the Seventh Sunday after TRINITY.*



2 SAMUEL XXIV. 10.

*And David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people: and David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.*

**I**N the two former Chapters we find King David represented like a glorious Sun, hastening to go down in a bright and clear Sky. He sings his last and largest Psalm of Praise to God, for his manifold Blessings and Deliverances vouchsafed him, and for granting peace and safety in all his borders. He had a great many wise and valiant men about him, who looked like very probable instruments in God's hands of maintaining the present happy Establishment, and securing a peaceable possession of the Throne to his Son and Successor, under whose government Judah might be saved, and Israel dwell safely.

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BUT behold here the sable Clouds are risen, and have spread a mournful Vail over the pleasant face of things. The King's Soul is disquieted with a tempest of guilty fears; the Prophet adds to his affliction, by denouncing the Wrath of God ready to break out upon him; and the People presently feel the sword of the destroying Angel upon their necks, and seventy thousand of them are struck dead with a Pestilence.

WHAT was it which brought down this heavy Judgment upon them, and so suddenly turn'd their light into darkness, and their life into death? This is intimated in my Text, and must be collected from other parts of this History. *David's heart smote him, because he had numbered his people.* Was it then so heinous a crime in him to order his Captains to return him a List of all the men that bare arms under them, that he might know the strength of his Kingdom? Is not this commonly done by all Princes of the Earth? and might not he do it as well as they?

THAT we may truly discover the particular circumstance wherein this Action of *David* offended God, let us enquire into two things.

I. WHAT was the impulsive cause or spring which moved *David* to number his People.

II. WHAT was the final cause, or end and design which he had in numbring them. And

I. FOR the spring and motive which incited *David* to number his People, we must look back to the beginning of this Chapter, where it is said, *that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and that he moved him to do it.* Now what sin it was whereby *Israel* had provoked God to anger against them, we shall consider presently. But whatever it was, this is certain, that God could not be the Author of *David's* sin. Whether it consisted in the act of numbering the People, or in some circumstance



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cumstance which attended this action, as facts of an indifferent nature become sinful according as they are circumstantiated, the sin could not be of God, but must proceed from some other Author. Who that Author was, we are informed in another view which is given us of this matter, 1 Chron. xxi. where it is plainly and roundly asserted, that *Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number them.*

THIS word *Satan*, which signifies an *Adversary*, cannot be understood of any of *David's* Counsellors; for *Joab* his chief Captain was utterly against it; and no body else durst have proposed it without him. We conclude therefore, that *Satan* is to be taken here in our usual acceptation of that word, for the chief of the fallen Angels, the grand enemy and accuser of Mankind, who suggested this thought to *David*, and instigated him to number *Israel*.

BUT how shall we clear up the seeming opposition which there is between these two Texts, imputing this action of *David* to such different principles? For the resolution hereof I crave leave to observe, that the LXX *Greek* Interpreters, and other ancient Versions understand the first Verse of this Chapter somewhat different from ours, thus: *The anger of the Lord being kindled against Israel, moved David to number them.*

NOW it will easily be granted, that wicked Men and Devils, being the Executioners of the Divine Judgments, may be called *The anger of the Lord*. That God afflicts and punishes by such instruments, is clear from the testimony of his own Word. Upon this account he calls *Nebuchadnezzar* his *Servant*, and tells *Sennacherib* he had raised him up on purpose to lay fenced Cities in ruinous heaps. So *Attila*, King of the *Huns*, in the fifth Century of Christianity, was called *the Scourge of God*,

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because he ravaged most parts of Christendom with Fire and Sword. Yet none of these Kings had any design to serve God in what they did. No; they were strangers to his Will, and enemies to his Worship, and exercised their arms only to make themselves rich, powerful, and formidable in the World. But God over-ruled and directed their fury so, as to make it subservient to his Will in the punishment of Men's Sins. And therefore it might justly be called, *the wrath of God*, because it could not have broke out to the destruction of Mankind, if he had not been first provoked to withdraw his protection, and give way to it.

IN the History before us, the Anger of the Lord was first kindled against *Israel*, and then *Satan* found room for his temptation, and easily prevailed with the King to number the People.

WHEN we hear that God was angry with *Israel*, we may be sure it was for some national, crying Sin. What that Sin was, the Sacred Text hath not inform'd us. Some think it was the late Rebellions under *Absalom*, and *Sheba* the Son of *Bichri*, in which, besides other gross violations of the divine Law, they were guilty of many outrages committed upon their Brethren, and had shed much innocent Blood, which by God's decree could not be atoned for, but by some publick judgment upon the Land where it was shed. Thus it hath happen'd among us in the days of our Fathers; scarcity, pestilence, and fire have closed the account of such Wars.

BUT perhaps there was something more of national Guilt upon *Israel*. In the xxi Chap. of this 2d of *Samuel*, we read of a three years Famine inflicted on them for their slaughter of the poor *Gibeonites*, contrary to an ancient treaty with that People. For this the Sacred Oracle directed them to make an atonement; which done, their Harvests were

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were restored. Now it is much to be suspected, that the People being deliver'd from the alarms of War, and enjoying the usual affluence of their Country, which was singularly great and good, gave themselves up to luxury and sensuality, as it is very common for People to do upon such changes of their circumstances; and then what imaginable Sin is there, which we may not suppose they committed against God? The histories of all Nations assure us, that peace and plenty, tho' blessings in themselves, are commonly abused to such a corruption of manners, as renders People intolerable, and arms the vengeance of God and Man against them. Instances of this kind are innumerable. I shall select one of modern date, and out of a neighbouring Country, written by an eye-witness, an Author much esteem'd for his great judgment and veracity; I mean *Philip Comines*, who wrote the History of *Charles the Bold*, the last Prince of *Burgundy*, and describes the state of the *Burgundians* just before they were swallowed up by the arms of *France* in the reign of *Lewis XI*.

' I think, says *Comines*, I have seen and known  
' the greatest part of *Europe*: yet I never knew  
' any Province or Country, tho' perhaps of a  
' larger Extent, so abounding in Money, so ex-  
' travagantly fine in furniture for their Horses, so  
' sumptuous in their Buildings, so profuse in their  
' Expences, so luxurious in their Feasts and Enter-  
' tainments, and so prodigal in all respects, as these  
' *Burgundians* were in my time. If any one think  
' I am extravagant in my description, and enlarge  
' too much, others my Cotemporaries will be of  
' opinion that I have rather said too little. But,  
' in short, as I have seen them in all respects the  
' most flourishing, so I have known them quickly  
' ruined, and left the most desolate and miserable  
' People of any in *Europe*. Such changes God in



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his Providence brings to pass, that the World may know that their prosperity and adversity are wholly at his disposal.

THIS may suffice to shew how prone we are to incense the wrath of God against us, by the abuse of our Peace and Plenty: And that such abuse was the particular Sin of *Israel*, which alienated God from them at this time, seems probable from the nature of the Judgments wherewith he proposed to correct them. For War and Famine were two of the three things which he offer'd to *David's* choice, for the expiation of his Sin. *Shall seven years of famine, says the Prophet, come upon thy land; or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies?* These are the most direct and effectual scourges to humble a Nation, when immerst in pride and luxury and forgetfulness of God.

AND thus we have seen how *Israel's* abuse of God's mercies provoked him to anger against them; and how, in pursuance of this anger, *Satan* instigated and perswaded the King to number them, which was the first thing I proposed to consider.

I now proceed to enquire,

II. WHAT was the final cause or end which *David* had in numbering his People.

AND since it appears from the account of it, that there was no War, nor rumour of War to alarm him, his design could be nothing else but to gratify his curiosity in seeing the strength of his Kingdom: It was a pleasure to him to contemplate his own and his family's grandeur, in having so many myriads of valiant Men at their command and service upon all occasions. This was *David's* reason for requiring an account of his forces, and his sin lay in glorying in their numbers, and placing too much confidence in them.

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SOME other circumstances we may suppose concurred to aggravate this offence. *Josephus* says expressly, that the King forgot to see payment made of the tribute due to the Tabernacle at such a general muster. For which there is a plain and positive order, *Exod. xxx. 12.* *When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel, says God to Moses, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, that there be no plague among them when thou numberest them. Every one that passeth among them that are numbred, from twenty years old and upward, shall give half a shekel for an offering to the Lord; and thou shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle; to make an atonement for your souls.* Now this half shekel a head, *Josephus* says, *David* neglected to levy and pay as is here directed. Which, if true, was a very gross omission, and most inexcusable in him who having studied the divine Law very constantly and carefully, as he testifies in his own *Psalms*, could not be ignorant of this part of it.

BESIDES, it does not appear that the Rulers of *Israel* ever muster'd their People, but for some evident and very good reason, chiefly to oppose invasions, or shake off the tyrannical yoke of their Oppressors: And in such exigences they proceeded with great solemnity; they offered sacrifice, asked counsel of God, and implored his assistance and blessing upon their undertaking. Whereas for this numbering no reason is pretended but the King's pleasure, nor any religious Duty performed to consecrate the Work.

FARTHER, if there were a competent number of standing Forces at this time in *Israel*, ready for any sudden occasion of War, then there was the less need of making such a strict scrutiny, to know what men every particular family could furnish. But that there were myriads of standing Forces,

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is the persuasion of learned Men. And they give this as the reason why there is such a difference between the two lists in 2 Sam. xxiv. and 1 Chron. xxi. In the former, say they, the regular troops were omitted; in the latter they were reckon'd with the rest of the People. This may very well be so, if those forces we read of 1 Chron. xxvii. who waited on the King by monthly courses, were settled at this time in that number and order.

WE may not, after all, exactly discern the most material aggravations of *David's* offence in numbering his People; the silence of the Scripture having left us to uncertain conjecture: But that it was an enterprize contrary to Religion and good Reason, is manifest from the answer of *Joab* the chief Captain, when he was put upon this service. For tho' his general character shows him to have been a Man of no very tender Conscience, yet here in this case he remonstrates against numbering of the People, as fully as his duty and respect to his Prince would permit. 1 Chron. xxi. 3. his answer to the King's command was this: *The Lord make his people an hundred times as many more as they are. But my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be the cause of trespass to Israel?* Here we see, that *Joab* from the very first saw that the numbering of the People would render them obnoxious to the Judgment of God.

BUT *David* was not sensible of this, till the whole affair which he had given *Joab* in commission was transacted; which took up the space of nine months and twenty days. At the end of which he and his subordinate Captains returned from their progress over the whole Land, and gave up the number of the People to the King in *Jerusalem*. Which when *David* had received, *his heart smote him*, i. e. he had a violent convulsion and



and remorse of Conscience for what he had done; As it commonly happens to unadvised Men, whose Lust transports them beyond their Reason. When their passion has spent its force, and they review their actions with the eyes of sober Sense and unprejudiced Judgment, then they cry out with our mistaken Prince, 'Would God I had never meddled with this business; I have acted very foolishly; I wonder how I could be guilty of such an error! I would be glad to give any thing, if I could but reverse it, and so abolish it, as if it had never been done.'

SUCH was *David's* remorse upon his receiving that List of his People, which he had set his heart so much upon at the first. Nothing more desirable in prospect; nothing more odious in the review. Some of our Interpreters think that this pang of Remorse came not upon him, till he heard the denunciation of God's Judgment from his Prophet. For, says our Version, *when he was up in the morning, next after the report of the number had been made to him, his prophet Gad came from the Lord, to offer him his choice of three sorts of visitations for the punishment of his sin.* And indeed, if it were necessary to render the conjunction *for*, which couples these words to my Text, we could not avoid the inference, that *David* had no sense of his Sin, till he heard of the punishment of it by his Prophet. But the original *Hebrew*, and other Versions, and the parallel place in the *Chronicles* read thus, *And David's seer came to him in the morning;* which leaves us room to conclude, that he was aware of his Sin, and felt the sting of it in his Conscience, before the Prophet came to reprove him for it.

WE need not make a difficulty to suppose, that such a Man as *David* should discover such an error as this, without a Monitor. Whether he had  
neg-

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lected to see a levy made of the half Shekel for the Tabernacle; or omitted to offer up Prayers and Sacrifices before he set about this Work; or found his Heart too much lifted up with the contemplation of his mighty Forces; whether he offended only in one, or in all these particulars; the wonder is how *David* could continue to act three quarters of a year out of his true Character, and not perceive it: For 'tis well known to have been his general practice, that he perused the Law of God with great pleasure and assiduity, perhaps above any other mortal Man, and made himself perfectly acquainted with it, and regulated his life by the directions of it. So that he was a Prophet of the first rank, and able to teach the Law of God to others, who esteem'd themselves great proficients in it.

IN the next place, he was a singular Monument of God's Favour and Protection, being by the Divine Appointment anointed King over *Israel*, when he was but a poor young Shepherd, and carried to that dignity by the Hand of God thro' such dangers and hardships as seemed insuperable. And lastly, no Man more abounded in acknowledgments that the issues of all affairs are in the hand of God, that shield and spear, sword and bow avail nothing without his Assistance; that he raises up the obscure, and throws down the mighty, and is continually ordering things so, as may convince the World, that *salvation is of the Lord*. His Book of *Psalms* is full of such confessions as these. But what need I refer to the whole Book, when we have such an ample proof of what I am asserting, but two Chapters before my Text? It was but a little before the disaster we are now speaking of, that this great Man was exercising his humility and self-denial, ascribing all his successes to the Power and Goodness of God.

AND

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AND is this the Man who strengthens himself in his Riches, and glories in the multitude of his Forces? He who but just now was celebrating God for his Shield, his Buckler, his Fortress and Deliverer, who girded him with strength to the Battle, and gave him the necks of his Enemies; can he now put his trust in man, and take man for his defence, and in his heart depart from the Lord? This was an affection of mind so contrary to *David's* true temper, that as soon as he was sensible of it, he abhorr'd it, and could not forgive himself for entertaining it: His Heart smote him for what he had done, and forced him to cry out, ' Lord, I ' have sinned, I have sinned exceedingly; I beseech thee, lay not this iniquity to my charge, ' for I have acted very foolishly.

THIS should be a warning to us all, to keep our Hearts with all diligence, that we be not overcome with the love of worldly things. For if these things could break into the Heart of such a holy man as *David*, who generally guarded against them; what victories will they be apt to gain over us who are not so vigilant? Too often, alas! do they alienate us from the love of God, and provoke him to punish us with the want even of necessary things, when we have been so ungrateful as to dishonour our supreme Benefactor with those temporal Blessings which he has bestowed upon us.

IT is not to be doubted but that many of the scourges which we smart under, are inflicted upon us for that perverse use which we make of the good things we enjoy. The design of God in bestowing them upon us, is to contribute to our real happiness; to teach us to enjoy them moderately, and to do good to others by a charitable communication of them, and to praise and glorify him who is the Giver of them. But we are too prone to cross and contradict all these ends of our Prosperity.



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rity. When we are exalted to the pinnacle of honour, we often lose our understanding; we forget our selves, and grow proud, insolent, and unmerciful towards others. When riches increase, our sensual lusts and corrupt manners commonly increase in proportion with them. When we dwell securely in full peace and health, we put away the evil day far from us, living as if we were never to die, nor appear before God to give an account of our Works. What shall we say? If we could comprehend the different states of all Nations in one view, I believe we should find none of their felicities to be long lived. For how many ages soever they might continue as Nations, yet they have never been free many years together from some publick grievance in their Government, or some war, famine, pestilence, or the like stroke from the hand of God; which are owing to the general ill state of Religion and Virtue in the World. Men are so apt to provoke God with their corrupt manners, especially when they are most at ease and leisure, that if he will maintain any authority, reverence, or reputation of governing amongst them, he must frequently chastise them for their enormities. And constant experience teaches, that this is the best way of governing, Men being much apter to seek after God in adversity, than in prosperity. Even this great and good King we are speaking of, confesses that the divine Corrections always conduced to his improvement, and his History shews that his greatest Sins were the fruits of his ease and security.

LET us then, when we fare well in body and estate, be more particularly concern'd for the welfare of our Souls, considering how rare it is for a Man to be happy in all these respects at one time: Let us often descend into our selves, to root out those noisome weeds of Pride, Atheism, and Sensuality,

quality, which so commonly grow luxuriant in the  
 sunshine of prosperity. And whenever our hea-  
 venly Father is pleased to exercise us with afflic-  
 tions, let us not so much apply for the removal  
 of them, as for his Grace to improve them to the  
 sanctification of our Nature; let us comfort our selves  
 with arguing as the Gospel teaches us, That in  
 these severe dispensations God treats us as his own  
 Children, and guides us in that narrow painful  
 way which leads to his heavenly Kingdom, and  
 conforms us to the Image of his dear Son, who  
 thro' the greatest of sufferings carried our Nature  
 into that Kingdom, where he hath glorified it, and  
 reigns in it with the Father and the Holy Ghost,  
 one God, &c.



SER-



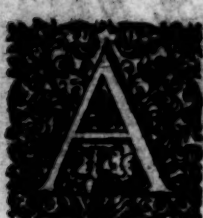
# SERMON XXXIII.

*On the Eighth Sunday after TRINITY.*



I KINGS xvii. 24.

*And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this  
I know that thou art a man of God, and  
that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is  
truth.*

T the end of the foregoing Chapter, we have an account of *Abah*, the Son and Successor of *Omri* King of *Israel*, how he robbed God of his honour by multiplying Idols against him in his own peculiar Inheritance, and did more to provoke him than all the Kings of *Israel* that went before him. Whence one might easily foresee that his Reign would be full of publick calamities. And presently we hear in the beginning of this Chapter, how God sent his herald to denounce the wrath of Heaven against him. The Prophet *Elijah* goes to *Samaria*, enters the Palace Royal, and presents himself before *Abah*, telling him he had merited so ill of the King of Heaven, that he would send him neither Rain nor Dew for some years



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years to come. And to leave the stronger impression of this threatening upon *Abab's* mind, he confirmed what he had said with an Oath, and so departed.

THO' the time which this drought lasted, is not here determined, yet we are assured by our Blessed Saviour, *Luke iv.* and *St. James chap. v.* that it continued three years and a half. Of which Interpreters think half a year was already past at this juncture, wherein the former and the later rain had been with-held; which *Abab* might look upon as meerly fortuitous, till *Elijah* assured him it was God's Visitation, and that this was but the beginning of it.

As soon as the Prophet had delivered his message, he went, as God directed him, to the Brook *Cherith*, which running between *Bethel* and *Jericho*, falls into *Jordan*. This was a convenient situation for him, partly that he might be out of the reach of *Abab's* indignation: For here was a Cave, which serv'd him for a hiding-place; over which *Helena*, the Mother of *Constantine* the Great, afterwards built a Chapel, in memory of the Prophet: And partly that he might drink of the Brook in the time of the Drought; for he was not exempted from the necessity of living like other Men. And because there was no human Creature near this desolate place, to order his diet for him, God commanded the Ravens, and they brought him Bread and Flesh every morning and evening, according to the Divine Promise and Revelation made to him before-hand. This God could have conveyed to him any other way, but he chose to send it by these rapacious Birds, for the greater illustration of his absolute command over all the Creatures, and to give us a full evidence, that he is able to succour and preserve by the most improbable means, all those who put their trust in him.

And

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And we need go no farther to enquire where the Ravens had this Food: It is enough if we believe that they brought it to *Elijah*; for then we must allow that they acted by the divine direction, and that it was of God's providing.

AFTER the Prophet had spent a year in this place, the Brook dried up, and the Angel of the Lord spoke to him to remove, and go to *Zarephath*, or *Sarepta*, a sea-coast Town belonging to *Sidon*, computed to be a hundred miles distant from *Cherib*: For there, says he, *I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee.*

Now this Town belonging to *Sidon*, was out of the dominion of the King of *Israel*, and I was going to say, of a different Religion. But I observe, that *Abab's Jezebel* was Daughter of the King of *Sidon*, and that she had established the worship of *Baal* in *Israel*; and consequently this Widow of *Sarepta*, tho' not of the Seed of *Abraham*, nor within the Pale of the true Church, might be as acceptable to God as any *Israelite*; and I think our Lord gives her the preference, *Luke iv. 25. There were, says he, many widows in Israel, in the days of Elias, in the time of the great drought and famine; but unto none of them was the Prophet sent, save unto a widow of Sarepta, a town of Sidon.* Upon hearing this, the Synagogue fell into such a rage and uproar, that they would have destroy'd Christ if he had not saved himself by a Miracle. And yet where is the cause for so much indignation, but in the preference which was suggested by this comparison, that Aliens were more deserving of the favour of God, than his own People?

*ELIJAH* went to *Sarepta*, as he was commanded; and when he came to the gate of the City, he saw the widow woman, with whom he was to sojourn, gathering of sticks to make a Fire, I suppose in some yard belonging to her own

own House; for we can hardly think that they lay in common. The Prophet being weary with travel, and faint with hunger and thirst, begged of this Woman for some relief; but she answered him, that she had but one short meal left for her self and her son, which was the last they expected to eat in this world: *Elijah* told her, that he was a Prophet of the God of *Israel*, who had sent him on purpose to preserve her and her son from perishing by this Famine; and that she might safely bring him a portion of her small store, which would derive such a blessing upon the rest, that *her barrel of meal should not waste, nor her cruse of oyl fail, until the Lord should send rain upon the Earth.*

HEREUPON the Woman went readily and fetcht the Prophet what he demanded: Whence I conclude, that this conversation had been represented to her before-hand in a Dream. For it is said before, that the Lord had commanded her to entertain the Prophet: And it is hard to think that any thing less than a divine warning could incline her not only to give him part of her last morsel, but to take him into her house, to lodge and board there, in a time of such scarcity, that the necessaries of life were not to be had for any money. By this act of Faith, she saved her own and her son's life. For her obedience to God, and her hospitality to his Prophet, were rewarded with a miraculous encrease of her store, so as that it continued to feed them all sufficiently to the end of the Famine, which is computed to have lasted two years from the time that *Elijah* first came to her house.

Now what shall we say to this Miracle? Our Atheists will certainly deny the matter of fact, and explode it as a fable, or give it some other meaning. For if they should grant that it was really



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done, they must allow the credibility of those other Scripture Histories, which tell us how God fed his People with *Manna* in the Wilderness by the space of forty years: And how the Son of God feasted many thousands of his followers with such a small quantity of provision, as, humanly speaking, was not sufficient to give every one of them a taste of it; and yet by the divine Power it was so augmented as to satiate the vast multitude, and left so many fragments at last, as exceeded the bulk of the first quantity. All this our Atheists will deny, and we cannot help it. But we have the comfort to know that their hardy denials cannot undo those things which have been done. If they cannot see that there is an omnipotent God which governs the world, it is not for want of demonstrations of his Power, which it would be endless to recount, even in the common dispensations of Providence; nor for want of an Understanding in man to discern this power; but it is because they have shut their eyes, and hardened their hearts, that they may put away from them the knowledge and fear and reverence of the Almighty. But let not any of us here present follow these blind guides in their abominable ways, lest being found in their company, we be finally swallowed up of that destruction which is prepared for such audacious enemies and blasphemers of God. We are as fully perswaded as if we had seen it, that by the infinite Power and Goodness of God, a handful of meal and a few spoonfuls of oil were so augmented as to serve the Widow of *Sarepta*'s family, during the many days above mentioned of a grievous Famine, until it pleased God to replenish the Earth with its usual fruits.

And blessed be God for this wonderful instance of his care and concern for his distressed Servants. The consideration of it should strongly influence  
and

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and turn our hearts to regard him as the Fountain of all Goodness, who sees all our necessities, and is able to supply them in all extremities. And it should convince us, that it is our wisest course and best policy to secure to our selves the favour of such an omnipotent Benefactor, by rendring him the homage of our Prayers, the confession of our Lips, the obedience of our whole Lives, against all the temptations of worldly fear or favour which can be offered to pervert us.

THIS Widow's example should likewise excite us to acts of Hospitality and Charity, tho' we have no such special direction to proper objects, as we suppose she had. For the general rules, and ever-binding laws of our Profession sufficiently inculcate this beneficent and communicative temper. This was one of the doctrines which *John Baptist* preached, in order to prepare the way of our Lord; *Luke iii. 11. He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and be that hath meat, let him do likewise.* He doth not say, he that hath a large wardrobe, let him clothe the poor out of his cast-cloaths; but, he who hath but two coats, which are as few as even a poor man can shift with; yet if he has a Brother that is quite destitute of a Garment, let him give him one to comfort him and defend him from the cold, and trust the common Parent and Giver of all good things, for a farther supply when he wants it. At present his naked Brother wants so as to perish if not speedily relieved; and the giver can wait till Providence sees fit to restore it.

THE same may be said of Food: Not only the Rich people of the world, who fare sumptuously every day, should feed the poor out of their superfluities; but even the Poor themselves should practise that mercy, which many times they loudly crave, and learn by their own sufferings to pity

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and impart to those who suffer more. This is natural; whereas the generality of poor people are unnatural, churlish, self-lovers, having hands always ready to receive, but never to give; Aliens and strangers from the Spirit of the Gospel, which obliges all Men to give upon proper occasions, and in proportion to their ability. *Be merciful after thy power*, says a good Father in his advice to his Son, *Tob. iv. 8, 9. If thou hast much, give plentifully. If thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little: for so gatherest thou thy self a good reward in the day of necessity.* Such a reward had this poor Widow of *Sarepta* for entertaining *Elijah*: And such another, I doubt not, had that other Widow mention'd in the Gospel, who threw her two mites into the treasury of the Temple. It was her all, and she trusted God with it, and was honoured with a publick testimony of the divine Acceptance: Tho' I am afraid, had she lived in these days of Infidelity, she would have been censured as a weak-headed, superstitious, melancholy Person.

SUCH Censurers think they have reason on their side, when they say, 'Give us such a Prophet as *Elijah*, and we will receive him into our houses with as ready a good will as this Widow did.' *St. Chrysostom* answers their challenge very well. 'I will, says he, bring you a greater, even the Lord of this Prophet, our common Saviour *Jesus Christ*.' But how does he make this out? why from *Christ's* own words, *Matth. xxv.* 'Whatever ye do to my poor brethren, the members of my mystical body, I shall esteem it as done to my self in the great day of Accounts. Those who have healed them, fed and cloathed them, ransomed them from prisons and slavery, shall be as well rewarded, as if they had been thus beneficent to my self in Person. On the contrary,



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ry, those who have despised poor Christians, and shown themselves merciless and inhuman towards them, shall be dealt with as severely, as if they had exercised the same cruelty to me.

LET us now return to the thread of our History, which tells us, that while *Elijah* lodged at the Widow of *Sarepta*'s house, her son beforementioned, and who is thought to have been her only child, fell sick and died. His mother was struck with inconsolable grief for this loss, and charged it upon the Prophet, that he had bereaved her of her son for the punishment of her sins. *Elijah*, to assure her of his sympathy in her affliction, took the child with the greatest tenderness, and carried him up to his own bed, where he prayed over him with such fervency of Spirit, that God was pleased to glorify his Prophet with a miracle, never known till this time. *For the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.* Then the Prophet brought the child down, and presented him alive into his mother's arms; who seeing those eyes which lately slept in death, to own her and smile upon her, the good Woman, transported with joy and wonder, told the Prophet, he had done enough: She was now abundantly convinced *that he was a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in his mouth was truth.*

WE are not to interpret these words so, as if the speaker was now first apprized upon this occasion, that *Elijah* was a Prophet of the true God. For I observed before, that he was made known to her long ago by a special Revelation: Neither was it possible for them to live so long together upon the miraculous supply which *Elijah* had foretold and promised in the name of the Lord, without the Woman's being perswaded, that his mission was from Heaven. But the raising her son from the dead, a thing which was never heard of before, in

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all the world, made the strongest impression upon her mind, fill'd her with an excess of joy, and obliged her to make a more particular acknowledgment of that, which no doubt she had confess'd in other words before, that *Elijah's* works proved him to be a Servant of the most high and holy God.

THE Inference which we may naturally make from this History, and one great reason why it stands upon record, is this, That we may know the Ministers and Servants of God by their Works, and that their Credentials, when there is occasion for them, are of such a sort, as demonstrate their Mission to be divine.

I KNOW very well, that the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, give us frequent and earnest warnings to beware of false Prophets, and not to be easily led away with their specious appearances of working miracles, for that some of them would be very plausible and surprizing. I think the world is now old enough, and full enough of Books, to furnish us with accounts of all sorts of Miracles, whether real or feigned; and I think any man of a sound Judgment and unprejudiced Mind might be trusted, and even left to himself to distinguish the one from the other. For tho' some such wonderful works as we read of in our sacred Scriptures, are said to have been done in those Countries where contrary Religions have prevail'd; yet so far as I have seen the accounts of them, they differ so widely, as to leave no comparison between the credibility of the one and the other. And that we may not go out of every ones knowledge for an instance or two, let us observe the account which *Moses* gives of his contest with the *Egyptian* Magicians. He frankly tells us, that by the power of their Magic they imitated his Miracles in several respects; for in several others they could not so much as imitate. And how poor their imitations were

were at the best, we may guess from the first of them, where we read how easily his Rod, turned into a Serpent, devoured all the Serpents, whether real or delusory, of the *Egyptians*. And that he was armed with a Power far superior to theirs; was proved by the issue, and by the testimony of others, as well as his own writings.

2. To pass over the *Dagon* of the *Philistines*, and some others, let us come to the time of the Prophet *Elijah*, of whom we read in the next Chapter, that to end disputes between himself and the Prophets of *Baal*, he proposed that both sides should call upon their Gods for fire to consume a Sacrifice; and that the God who answered by fire, should be acknowledged in common, as the only true God. *Baal's* Prophets accepted the condition, which I hardly think they would have done, had not they depended upon their Idol, from some former experience, that he would have done something for them, to have amused at least, and surprized the People. But in this competition he was restrained, and unable to do any thing at all. Whereas the God of *Israel*, upon a short application of his Prophet, sent so much fire as not only consumed the Sacrifice, but instantly dried up the water in which *Elijah* had floated it, that he might shew his Faith in his God, and render the Miracle the more conspicuous.

3. LET us proceed to the beginnings of Christianity. We read, *Acts viii.* that one *Simon* a Magician was grown famous in *Samaria*, and had so amazed the People of that City with his arts, that they gave him no less a Style than, *The great power of God*. But when the Power of Christ came among them in *Philip* the Christian Deacon, the power of *Simon* was so eclipsed and lessened, that he desired to exchange it for the other. And from thenceforth the vanity of Idols and infernal Arts



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was exposed before the world, and they fell like the *Philistines Dagon* before the Ark of God.

As thus the miracles of true Prophets have infinitely outshone those of the false, so likewise have their words, discourses, and writings. Let any man, who is capable of doing it, compare the *Moran*, or any other system of false Religion, with our sacred Scriptures; and, if he has not lost his understanding, he must needs see, that ours are far more worthy of God, more agreeable to the Reason of man, and better suited to attain the happiness both of our Souls and Bodies, than all the rest. Let any man who has read such Books as are writ against our Holy Religion, speak impartially, if he does not find the matter of them such, as may be justly called The dictates of an evil Spirit; if the arguments of them deserve to be named with the sound sense, gravity, and serious reasonings of what we call, *the word of God*. Let him look out to the Authors of them, and name one, if he can, who is not pleased with that blasphemy, lewdness, confusion, and every evil work against God and Man, which he sees prevailing among their followers and admirers.

THE Prophet *Elijah* wrought but two miracles in the Widow of *Sarepta's* house, by which she declares her self fully convinced that he was the Servant of God, and spoke nothing but the truth in his name. But suppose he had wrought many more, so as to have made them common; had the feeding of her Family, and raising her Son from the dead, been less miraculous? Suppose he had wrought them in other places, where she could not have known all the circumstances so, as to have clearly discern'd the Finger of God in them; had those which he did for her, been less divine? If she was satisfied that her Son was actually dead, and brought to life again by the Prayers of the

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Prophet, was not this enough to convince her, that God was with him, and to perswade her, that he always spake and acted agreeably to the mind of God, tho' she could not always comprehend his meaning?

I do not think there is any man living, who understands the holy Scriptures, or indeed any other ancient Writer, exactly well, in several things which depend upon the nature, customs, and genius of the Country where, and the Times when they were written. We see that learned men, who study these things, are daily explaining them, and setting them in a new light. What then? Shall those who do not comprehend every thing, believe nothing? Or is there not rather ground enough for any reasonable and sober man to conclude, from what he knows and understands of the word of God, that those passages of it which are above his understanding, must be likewise true? There are some things which are such plain indications of a divine Power, that they serve as seals to give credit to others which are not so intelligible. The woman in my Text argued as justly as the best Logician in the world, when she concluded from *Elijah's* raising her Son from the dead, that he was indeed the man he pretended to be. For by this miracle the Almighty Creator, who hath the issues of Life and Death in his hands, in whom we all live and move and have our Being, gave the highest testimony, that the man, at whose instance he did it, was his servant.

AND thus all People of good sense, whether male or female, learned or unlearned, have always reasoned upon like cases. When our blessed Lord had opened the eyes of the man who was born blind, with no other means than washing in common water, the Patient stoutly maintained it before the Rulers of the *Jews*, that his Healer must needs

## 26 SERMON XXXIIH. On the

needs be a Prophet of God: 'for, says he, this is undeniably the work of God: But God would never work by this man, if he were his enemy, and acted contrary to his will in other things. This is what brought *Nicodemus*, and many other considerable men, to acknowledge, tho' privately, that our Lord was the Person he pretended to be, John iii. *Rabbi*, says he, *we know that thou art a teacher sent from God: for no man can do those works which thou dost, except God were with him.* And when he had raised *Lazarus* from the dead, it is no wonder that many of the *Jews* believed him to be the *Messiah*. The wonder is, how any of them who allowed the Fact, could withhold their Faith, as we find they did; and sought to kill *Lazarus*, that he might not be a living monument of so Divine a Miracle. But the Widow of *Sarepta* shall rise up in the last Judgment against such repro-bates, and shall condemn them: For she acknowledged *Elijah*, upon the raising of her Son, to be a Prophet sent from God, whereas these wretches persecuted the Author of a Resurrection attended with more wonderful circumstances.

Let us all be warned by these things, to save our selves from this untoward and sinful Generation. Let us not reject those holy Men who have spoken to us in the Name of the Lord, and have by their powerful preaching, holy lives, and mighty works, abundantly established their reputation, that they were the Prophets and Apostles of God. Let us seriously regard all that they have spoken concerning the Christ the Son of God, and particularly that which is said of him by his fore-runner *John the Baptist*, who came in the Spirit and Power of *Elijah*, to prepare his way before him, by preaching Repentance and remission of Sins in his Name; and bare witness of him, saying, 'This is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of



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of the world, the light which shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not; the only begotten Son, who came from the bosom of the Father, to declare his nature, will, and worship to us. Let us thankfully embrace the writings of his Evangelists and Apostles, concerning his holy Life, heavenly Doctrine, wonderful Works, and Resurrection from the Dead, that so governing our selves by this faith, we may be raised out of the dust by his power, according to his gracious promises, and be invested with that Glory which was seen at his Transfiguration, in the company of *Moses* and *Elias*, and finally be exalted to that immortal Kingdom where all faithful Christians shall ever dwell with Christ their Lord and Head, and where he now reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God world without end.



**S E R.**



SERMON XXXIV.

On the Ninth Sunday after TRINITY.



*And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only am left; and they seek my life to take it away.*

 T. Paul, in the eleventh Chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, citing this passage, saith, that *Elias made intercession to God against Israel, i. e. he remonstrated against Israel's impiety and apostasy,* in the instances here mentioned. But for his own particular sufferings, they were occasioned by the instigation of Queen *Jezebel*, as appears from the beginning of this Chapter, where we learn, that when *Ahab* had given his wife an account of all that had happened in the late great assembly at Mount *Carmel*, and how, when *Elijah's* sacrifice had been offered with all the tokens of the Divine Acceptance, he had instigated the People to fall upon

upon *Baal's* Prophets, and put them to death: *Yezebel* was so far from being moved by the Hand of God, which was manifested in this business, to embrace the Prophet's Religion, that she sent him a message to assure him, that his triumph should be very short; and that he had but one day longer to continue in life.

It may seem strange, that when she had resolved upon the Prophet's death, she should give him such express notice of it: But this may be imputed to the excess of her rage, which would not suffer her to keep it to her self. And she thought perhaps, that she had him so sure, that he could not escape her; or rather that his own hardy Spirit would embolden him to stand out against her, as he had lately done against *Abab* in the great dispute at *Carmel* before mentioned.

HOWEVER, the Prophet made that use of this warning, which a prudent man ought to do in such circumstances. He had lately done enough at *Carmel*, to show the power of his God and the truth of his Religion; and caused four hundred and fifty of *Baal's* Priests to be sacrificed for their Idolatry. This wonderful victory over *Baal* and his worshippers, had not stirred up the hearts of the Princes of *Israel*, as it should have done, to banish the usurping Spirits, and restore the Altars, Laws, and Service of the God of their Fathers: It was therefore fit that *Elijah* should leave them as incorrigible, and provide for his own safety. Accordingly he arose, and fled for his life; first, to *Beer-sheba*, which was the utmost border of *Judea*, where he left his servant, because he resolved to go farther into the wilderness, famous for the travels of *Israel* out of *Egypt*, and to spend some time there, in a solitary and mortified life: And he would not bring the young man into the same hardships, which were not suitable to his age and condition.

INTO



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IN to the Wilderness therefore he came, and after he had travelled a day's journey in it, he sat down in the evening under a Juniper-tree; and when he had made his Prayers to God, in which he requested to be taken out of this miserable life, as not able to do any farther service in it, he composed himself to sleep. He had not rested long before an Angel awaked him, bidding him rise and take some refreshment: Whereupon he lifted up his head, and when he had looked about him, he saw a new-baked cake, and a cruse of water placed just behind him. These he took into his hands, and when he had eaten and drank enough of them to satisfy his present cravings, he laid him down to sleep again, being weary with age and travel, and not so surprized at this miraculous Table in the wilderness, as he must otherwise have been, had he not been formerly fed several times by miracle.

BUT the Angel who brought him this food, quickly came and raised him again, telling him he must eat the whole of it, for that it was given him on purpose to strengthen him for many days travel in the Wilderness. And it plainly appeared by the effect, that this was extraordinary food indeed, and afforded a more vigorous nourishment than any other that was ever heard of: For the Prophet went in the strength of it forty days and nights, till he came to *Horeb* the Mount of God. Not that *Horeb*, in a right line, was so many days journey from *Beersheba*. It was but about an hundred miles distance, which might have been gone in a few days, even by an elderly man. And therefore *Elijah*, not being in haste, either went much about, or sometimes rested long in a place, to make it forty days to get thither. Unless we should bring into the number of these days, the time which he spent at *Horeb*, and in his return  
from

from thence; it being very agreeable to Reason that we should reckon thus, tho' not so consistent with the letter of the sacred Text.

*ELIJAH* being arrived at *Horeb*, took up his lodging in a Cave in the side of the Mountain, the memory of which is still preserved by a Chapel built there. It was called the Mount of God, as being held sacred even before the days of *Moses*, but particularly because he waited upon God, and heard him speak from Heaven, and received the Law from him in this Mountain. While he was at this place, several things of an extraordinary sort happened; as first, a violent wind, which was so prodigiously strong, that it rent the mountains, and threw down and brake in pieces the rocks; after that an earthquake; thirdly, a great deal of thunder and lightening, such as was at the delivery of the Law of *Moses*; and lastly, a still small voice, which came from the *Shechinah*, or Divine Majesty, and demanded of *Elijah*, *What he did in that place.*

SOME Commentators have interpreted these words as God's reproof to the Prophet for leaving *Jezreel* and *Samaria*, where he was still wanted to oppose their Idolatry, and retiring to the desert where there was no such business to be done.

THE lawfulness of flying in time of persecution hath been considered by several wise men and learned writers of old. The two most notable ones which I remember on this occasion, are *Tertullian* and *Athanasius*. The first, who lived in the second Century of Christianity, condemns it; the other, who flourished a hundred and thirty years after, defends it. Living in such different ages, they could not write one against the other; so that it was not a controversy between these two men, but they wrote upon other occasions. And the occasions being considered, and just allowances made for their different tem-

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temper and circumstances, a candid Reader will find good weight and reason in both discourses, with no great difference between them.

BUT because *Athanasius* is most for our purpose, I will show you his way of arguing, and justifying flight from persecutors, as agreeable to the will of God, and the practice of the best of men.

Those, says he, (meaning the *Arians*) who blame us for withdrawing and hiding our selves from our mortal enemies, what will they say to *Jacob's* flying from the face of his brother *Esau*? and to *Moses* his flight into *Midian* for fear of *Pharaoh*? How will these Casuists, who hold it unlawful to fly in persecution, defend *David's* leaving his house as he did, that he might escape the hands of *Saul's* Cut-throats? or his hiding himself in the Cave of *Adullam*? or his feigning himself to be mad in the Court of *Achish* King of *Gath*, when they grew jealous of him there, as too considerable a man? How will these unthinking disputants defend the great *Elijah*, who tho' he had such power with God, as even to raise the dead, yet fled twice in persecution; first from the wrath of *Ahab*, and afterwards from that of *Jezebel*?

To come to our Christian Dispensation; Did not Christ's Disciples hold their assemblies as privately as they could, and in upper rooms, for fear of the *Jews*? as we read in the *Acts* of the Apostles. And St. *Paul* tells us, that when he was at *Damascus*, his Christian Brethren understanding that the Governor of the City laid wait at the gates for him, to apprehend him, they let him down in a basket over the City-wall, and so he made his escape. But if examples will not satisfy, we can abundantly strengthen them with the rules and precepts of the divine Law. *When they persecute you in one city, says our Saviour, fly to another.*



ber. And when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, then let those that are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let not him that is on the house-top, come down to take any thing out of his house. Let not him that is in the field, return home to fetch any thing, not even his coat, or most necessary apparel. And the great Legislator himself practised his own rules from his first coming into the World, till he had finished the work of his Ministry in it. Witness his flight into Egypt in the arms of his Mother, to avoid the fate of the murdered Innocents: His retiring into a desert place, when he heard of the beheading of John the Baptist: His frequent withdrawals from the Jews, when they went about to kill him. And when in their great council of Priests and Pharisees, they came to a resolution to cut him off, because he had raised Lazarus from the dead; it is said, *John xi. that Jesus walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence to a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there he continued with his disciples.*

Now from these authorities and examples it manifestly appears to be the will of God, that his servants should, in some cases, save themselves by flight from the murderous designs of their persecutors; because they may do him more service in life than death. Whenever this shall be the case, it will speak for it self, and be easily understood by all persons of a good discernment. When they see that the Glory of God demands their presence to abide by it, they set aside all considerations of safety, and offer their lives to serve their great Master. This did all the Prophets and Apostles, and Jesus Christ himself. And he gives his blessing to those who in such circumstances are persecuted even to death, and commends the good Shepherd, who bravely abides by his flock, and lays down

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his life for them. Such a one was the Prophet *Elijah* here before us, who put his life in his hands to serve *Israel*, and did and said all that he knew to be the will of God, without any fear of *Abah* or *Jezebel*. And therefore we may safely conclude, and indeed the event shewed it, that when he fled from them, it was more for the service of God, that he should go than tarry.

AND this is the ground of his apology, which he makes for his flight in the words of my Text, For when the question was asked him, *what he did at Horeb*: 'Oh, says he, my zeal for the Lord God of Hosts hath brought me hither. I have done my utmost to hinder the apostasy of the children of *Israel*; but nothing can withstand it. They have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, slain thy prophets with the sword. And I being the only man from whom they apprehend opposition, they seek to make me a sacrifice to their new God *Baal*.'

IN which words there are these particulars which deserve our farther consideration.

THE first thing which the Prophet alledges in excuse of his flight, is this, that he had testified a zeal for the Lord of Hosts, and that not an ordinary one. *I have*, says he, *been very zealous*. And it was well for him that he had been so. For if he had run to *Horeb*, without any other plea in his mouth than this, that he had kept his principles and his conscience to himself, without going over to a strange Religion; but being but one man, he had not appeared in publick, as not being able to bear up against such a torrent of Impiety. This plea would have suited but ill with the character of a Prophet, who by his office is a publick Minister of Religion, and thereby bound to vindicate the purity, and promote the practice of it among the people where he resides. Let us hear what

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what God required of his Prophets in general, and then we shall see that Zeal was an indispensable part of their office. Cry aloud, says he to *Isaiah*, lviii. and spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of *Jacob* their sin. And to *Jeremiah* he says, Thou shalt go to all, to whom I send thee; and whatsoever I command thee, that shalt thou speak. But yet more expressly he enjoins *Ezekiel* to speak freely, tho' briars and thorns were in his way, and he dwelt among scorpions, to tell them the whole truth, let the consequence be what it would. Thou art, says he, my watchman to the house of *Israel*: therefore thou shalt bear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. And if thou forbear to warn a wicked man, he shall die in his sins, but his blood will I require at thy hand.

By these passages it appears, that a Prophet was nothing, without such a degree of zeal, as would animate him to vindicate God's true Religion in the worst of times, when it was dangerous to appear for it, and when he had no reason to hope that he should be able to advance it, by all that he could do or say for it. Yet the divine Injunction was this, *Speak all my words, and suppress none of them, whether the people will hear, or whether they will forbear.*

SUCH a zeal is very necessary to make due impressions upon the minds of people, and convince them of the importance of Religion; which is apt to sink into neglect and contempt, when the Guardians of it are like men asleep, who cannot hear the voice of prophaneness and blasphemy, tho' it be very loud, nor see the overflowings of impiety, when they rise so high, as to beat over the fences of God's heritage. Certainly a brave zealous man may do much service in such circumstances. We know that Religion, under God, has



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owed its preservation even to one such man. But if he should not be able to do much in his own time, yet his zealous endeavours may prove of great service to the piety of future generations. I doubt not but of the many millions, who have sate under the preaching of God's word, and heard of *Elijah's* zeal against the Prophets of *Baal*, great numbers have been much benefited by the account of it; the weak have been strengthened, the wavering have been settled, their esteem of God's Glory has been much raised, their notions of his infinite Wisdom, Presence, and Power, have been enlarged, by what they have seen and heard of him in the History of the Prophet *Elijah*.

AND therefore it was well for *Elijah*, as I noted before, that he could plead his zeal for the Lord of Hosts: For hereby he has escaped the condemnation of those negligent Prophets and Ministers, who by their luke-warmness have betrayed their Master's honour, and the life of his Flock; and he hath obtained that eminent degree of Glory, which is the crown of those who turn many to righteousness.

2. He proceeds to complain of the Children of *Israel*, that notwithstanding the zeal and concern which he had exprest for their common Lord, and the miraculous favours which he had vouchsafed him, especially in his sacrifice at *Carmel*; yet after all, *these incorrigible people had forsaken his law*, which they had covenanted to observe, and by throwing down his Altars and killing his Ministers, had done their utmost to root out and banish his worship from among them.

It is observable, that the Prophet charges this apostasy upon the Children of *Israel*; he says nothing of *Abab* and *Jezebel*, tho' they were at the head of it, and the first and principal movers in it: Not that he forbears to mention them out of respect

spect to their persons: He was discharged from that ceremony by the nature, duty, and commission of his Office, as described before. And we see afterwards, chap. xxi. how boldly he pronounced a dreadful sentence of impending Judgments to the very face of *Ahab*, upon him and all his household, when God sent him to do it.

It may be said, that this is only a shorter way of speaking, and that by *the children of Israel*, *Elijah* comprehends Head and Members all under one. And this, I own, is a fair way of interpreting.

BUT then I think we may justly conclude from hence, that in this revolt from God to *Baal*, the members were as guilty as the head: And that the Prophet intends to prevent them from taking shelter in this excuse, that living under idolatrous Governors, they could not help this change in Religion. But they might have helped it very much. If *Israel* had stood firm to their covenant with their God, *Baal* would hardly have got a visible Church in all their Tribes, even tho' he had *Ahab* and *Jezebel* for his Founders. And perhaps even they would have judged it their best policy to have forborn honouring him with a publick Altar. Ill-disposed Governors are made much worse by flattering Subjects, who strive who shall be foremost in complying with their sins; and so they mutually push one another into the grossest enormities. How brave a people were the old *Romans* under their consular state? How free and open in their speeches? How hard to be seduced from the good old ways of justice and plain-dealing? But when they had changed their Consuls for Emperors, their spirits were quickly changed too, and they grew such dissemblers, hypocrites, so entirely obsequious to the supreme Nod, that their own Sovereigns have observed it with wonder and indignation, and have gone out of their Senate lifting up their

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eyes, and saying in a low voice, *Wretches, ripe for the yoke of bondage!* Just such people were the *Israelites* under the government of *Ahab*.

BUT some people think they may do every thing commanded them by lawful authority; and that the Commanders, not the Doers, are to answer for the sins and ill consequences of it. But this is a great mistake: For God has a right to man's obedience before all created Powers. And when we know his will, (as we easily may in matters of piety and virtue) we are bound to prefer it to any contrary order, according to that undeniable rule, that *it is fit to obey God rather than man*. The *Israelites* could not be ignorant of this rule, it is so easily collected from the whole tenor of their own law, and we have it in terms from men of their own Nation. And therefore when *Ahab* destroyed their old Religion, and gave them a new one instead of it, they should utterly have refused their obedience, and have given this rule for their reason. Which they failing to do, *Elijah* justly charges it upon these children of *Israel*, that they had forsaken God's covenant, thrown down his altars, and slain his prophets with the sword. For this could never have been done in *Israel*, but by the hands of *Israelites*, who ought not to have done it.

3. WHEN the Prophet complains that his people had thrown down the altars of God, Interpreters are at a loss to know where to find these altars; for according to the Law, there was but one altar and place of sacrificing, and that was at *Jerusalem*; and this no doubt is the reason why the *Chaldee* Paraphrast has rendered this word in the singular number. But the original *Hebrew* is plural, and other Interpreters adhere to it. And indeed *Israel* at this time, and for many years before, had no concern or power at *Jerusalem*. They were a distinct Kingdom of themselves; and *Jeroboam*, under



under whom their Kingdom begun, had put a stop to their going up to *Jerusalem* to worship. So that when *Elijah* complains that the Children of *Israel* had thrown down God's Altars, and slain his Prophets, we must not imagine that the Altar at *Jerusalem*, and the Prophets of *Judah*, were destroyed by them: No, they were in a flourishing condition at that time, under *Jehoshaphat*, a very good King. The Altars then which *Israel* threw down, were such as they found in their own Country; such as had been built by the Patriarchs and holy Men, before the foundation of the temple at *Jerusalem*. Of these we read, that there was one at *Ramah*, another at *Mispeh*, a third at *Gilgal*, a fourth at *Beitblehem*, a fifth at *Carmel*; and there might be more in other places. On these the pious people of the ten Tribes offered their sacrifices, when they were not permitted to go up to *Jerusalem* to worship. *Jeroboam* had forbid them to go thither, and now *Ahab* deprived them of these last reserved comforts.

BUT what occasion could there be for Altars, if there were no Sacrificers? *Elijah* complains, in the fourth place, that the Prophets of God were so rooted out of *Israel*, that he only was left, and was forced to fly his Country for the saving of his life.

WE must not interpret the word *only* in such a restrained sense, as if none but *Elijah* had survived the persecution, which was raised against the worshippers of the God of *Israel*. For presently after my Text God assures him, that he had reserved to himself seven thousand *Israelites*, who stood firm in their Religion, and had not bowed their knees to *Baal*. And besides, *Obadiab* had told him, chap. xviii. how he concealed an hundred of the Lord's Prophets from *Jezebel's* Executioners, and took care they were provided of sustenance

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stenance in their concealment. Whence we conclude that *Elijah* could not be ignorant, that there were some Prophets besides himself, and other Servants of God now living in *Israel*.

WHEN therefore our Prophet says, *that he only was left*, he means that he was the only acting man, in this controversy between God and *Baal*, who shewed himself openly as God's Champion, against a whole army of Idolaters, with a King and Queen at the head of them. This is agreeable to what he said before, chap. xviii. when he proposed the trial of Religion by sacrifice: *I, even I only*, says he to the people, *remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.*

So that whatever *Obadiab's* Prophets, or the seven thousand men were, they either wanted age, or abilities, or courage, to come forth and plead for their Law, and their God, against a Religion which had all the power of the sovereign Authority to support it. They all kept out of the dangerous conflict: And tho' they would not renounce their God, yet they had not zeal and courage enough to own him publicly at this time. Not one of them joined *Elijah*, but left him to stand or fall by himself. So that he had truth and reason of his side, when he said he was the only Prophet of the Lord who appeared in his cause at this juncture.

To us certainly *Elijah* was the only Prophet and Advocate of the cause of God at that time. To his zealous and active Spirit we are indebted for the glorious opposition which was made to idolatry at Mount *Carmel*. And of him we may learn what to think of the indolent professors of Religion; such, I mean, as can hear it reviled by blasphemous tongues, without shewing any concern about it. Shall I say this great Prophet accounts  
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of them as no better than shadows and cyphers? I think he insinuates something worse of them. For when he says, that all *Israel*, except himself, had forsaken God's Covenant, he certainly intends to upbraid those hundreds and thousands who preferred their own security before the Glory of God; and though they did not renounce him, yet neither would they make any open confession of him in dangerous times. They practised according to the saying of the Emperor *Tiberius*, *they left God to reckon with his enemies, and to do himself justice upon them.*

BUT this will not serve to excuse our easiness at the outrages of Atheists. For our heavenly as well as earthly Sovereign will judge us as Traitors and Enemies to his Government, if when it is struck at and undermined, we can be easy, and maintain a friendly communication with the aggressors. We justly celebrate *John the Baptist*, who came in the Spirit and Power of *Elias*, for that he constantly spoke the truth, boldly rebuked vice, and patiently suffered death for that truth which he had taught. And *from the days of John the Baptist*, says our Lord, *the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*: By which, I suppose, he means, that no man who has not a true zeal for the honour and glory of God, shall ever be admitted into his heavenly Kingdom.

HOWEVER, if this be not plain enough, yet sure we cannot mistake those words of Christ, *Mark viii. 38. Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.* Let but these words be received into our hearts with that faith and reverence which we owe is due to them, and they will much conduce to  
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# SERMON XXXIV

strive in us, that zeal for God which I have been recommending. At least they will make us careful to avoid the company of those wicked men, who are not afraid to sport with God and sacred Things. And by such avoidance we shall have a share in that blessing with which holy David begins his Book of Psalms, saying, *Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful; he shall obtain blessing from the Lord, and honour from the God of his salvation, thro' his merits who came not to lessen, but exalt our zeal for the glory of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, &c.*



How ever, if this be not plain enough, yet we cannot mistake those words of Christ, *John 14. 23. Whosoever shall be a friend of mine, and not of my Father, who sent me, shall be an enemy of me and of my Father.* I am sure these words be received into our hearts with that faith and reverence which we owe to him who said them, and they will much conduce to

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# SERMON XXXV.

*On the Tenth Sunday after TRINITY.*



1 KINGS xxii. 35.  
*And the battel increased that day; and the king was slayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even.*

**T**HE King who died was *Abab*, that great enemy of the God of *Israel*, and friend of the *Sidonian Baal*, by whose Prophets he was seduced to undertake this war: Whereas the oracles of truth forewarned him of his fate which he met here. But he slighted the Divine Warnings, and so perished thro' his contempt of God's Word.

THE Syrians, whose chief City was *Damascus*, bordered upon *Israel*, and had frequent wars with them. Under King *David*, *Israel* prevailed, and *Damascus* was tributary. But under *Abab* their Success was so changed with their Religion, that *Benhadad*, then King of *Syria*, treated the King of *Israel* as his vassal. He forced him to do homage for all that he enjoyed, even to his very wives and children: And might easily have maintained his

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his superiority, could he have used it with any discretion: But he must needs raise an army, without any just provocation, and lead them against *Samaria*; which brought the *Israelites* to a necessity of arming, and fighting the *Syrians*: Over whom they obtained two victories, and in the second battel they routed them so entirely, as to take *Benbadad* their King prisoner. But upon his application to *Ahab*, he was treated with great courtesy, and quickly set at full liberty.

THIS conduct of *Ahab's*, as it was contrary to all the rules of good policy, so was it particularly displeasing to Almighty God; who had sent his Prophet twice to instruct *Ahab* how to manage the war, and to assure him of the victory. And this God did, partly to open *Ahab's* eyes, and make him see how he had sinned in suppressing his worship; and partly to make an example of *Benbadad*, who had behaved himself in this war with the highest contempt and defiance, both of the God and King of *Israel*.

AND therefore *Ahab* should not have dismissed him without God's leave, whose prisoner he was, to be disposed of as he should have directed. By releasing him so hastily, without consulting God who had delivered him into his hands, he brought a heavy sentence upon himself. For a Prophet presently came to him with this message, *Thus saith the Lord; Because thou hast let a man go out of thy band, whom I had appointed to destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.*

How this sentence was fulfilled upon *Ahab*, we read in this xxii chap. whence my Text is taken. After *Israel* had been at peace with *Syria* for about three years, the war broke out again upon this occasion. *Jehoshaphat* King of *Judah* had contracted affinity with *Ahab*, for he had married his



his eldest son to *Ahab's* daughter, and he went to *Samaria* to make *Ahab* a visit. While he was there, *Ahab* complained of an injury which the *Syrian* did him, in detaining from him *Ramoth* a City in *Gilead*, contrary to the promise which *Ben-hadad* made, when he was taken prisoner in *Samaria*. This *Ramoth* properly belonged to the Tribe of *Gad*, on the other side *Jordan*; but because it bordered upon the *Syrians*, and gave them a good advantage over the *Israelites*, they could not find a heart to part with it, notwithstanding their promise.

*AHAB* having overthrown them twice in the last war, was encouraged to hope for the like success again, especially if *Jehoshaphat* would join forces with him: Whose assistance he took this opportunity to solicit, and found him as compliant as his heart could wish. *Jehoshaphat* only desired that, according to the good old way of Religion in *Israel* and *Judah*, some Prophets might be consulted, that they might know whether their undertaking were agreeable to the will of God. *Ahab* quickly called together a large number of Prophets, no less than four hundred men, and put this question to them: *Shall I go up against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?* Which question when the Prophets had taken a short time to consider of, they unanimously answered, *Go up, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.*

WHETHER these men were those Prophets of the Groves, spoken of chap. xviii, who were not slain with *Baal's* Prophets, or whether they were bred in schools of ancient institution in *Israel*, as some think, because they prophesied in the Name of the Lord, certain it is that they were false Prophets, as the event shewed; and such *Jehoshaphat* took them to be, which made him ask, whether there were not a Prophet of the Lord besides these, whom they might consult? *Ahab* answered, there was one *Micaiah*

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*caiah at hand; but, says he, I hate to have any concern with him; for he never prophesied a good thing of me in his life, but always evil. But Jehoshaphat intimating that he hoped better, Micaiah was sent for.*

SOME of the Jewish Doctors were of opinion, that this *Micaiah* was the Prophet who reproved *Ahab* for his over-easy and hasty release of *Benhadad*, and showed him how by this rash act he owed God a life which the *Syrian* should have paid him; *Thy life, says he, shall go for his life.* For this freedom, they suppose, with great probability, that *Ahab* threw him into prison; for he hated such a plain-dealer, and loved to be flattered, even at the expence of his own life and fortunes: And this is the reason why he knew *Micaiah* so particularly well, and could send for him so readily now when he wanted him.

BY the way, we must take care not to confound this *Micaiah*, as some have done, with the Prophet *Micah*, whose Book makes part of our Bible: For this lived under *Jehoshaphat* and *Ahab*, the other under *Jotham* and *Ahaz*, one hundred and fifty years after: This prophesied in *Israel*, the other in *Judah*.

THE messenger who was sent to fetch *Micaiah*, was very careful to inform him, how all the Prophets with one mouth assured the King, that his arms should prosper at *Ramoth-Gilead*: And, *I pray thee, says he, let thy word be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good.* But what? whether it was the word of God or not? Yes; for it was great pity that any thing should discompose the King's mind, now it was so sweetly charmed by the harmony of his Prophets. We see *Ahab's* officer was a complete Courtier: He served a Master who loved to be flattered, and he would not have him ruffled with an ungrateful truth, tho'

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it were to save his life. Such fine breeding and tender regards of Servants, have carried away many a Prince with an easy passage, to utter destruction.

THIS sounded strange in the ears of *Micaiah*, and could not but move his indignation, to observe that the man thought him capable of prevaricating so basely, as to conceal one thing in his heart, and utter another with his lips. He was not to seek for an answer, and indeed it was the only one that could be given to such a request: *Whatsoever the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak.*

WHEN *Micaiah* came into the presence of the two Kings, who were sitting upon their Thrones in a spacious place, adorned with their royal robes, *Ahab* put the same question to him, as he had put to the rest of the Prophets: *Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And the Prophet gave the very same answer as the others had done: Go and prosper; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.*

BUT it is plain, from what follows, that he did not intend this for a serious answer; nor did *Ahab* take it for such. He spoke it with such a look and gesture and tone of voice, as shewed that he intended no more by it, than to ridicule and mimic the other Prophets.

FOR when *Ahab* adjured him to declare in good earnest what he had to say in the Name of the Lord, he told him, that he saw in a vision all *Israel* scattered upon the hills, as sheep that had no shepherd: And that he heard the Lord say, *These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace.* This *Ahab* saw plain enough was an intimation, that he should fall in the battle, and that his people should flee. Whereupon he turned to *Jebozaphat* and said, *Did not I tell you, that he would prophecy no good concerning me, but evil?*



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*MICAH* then proceeds to tell him a second vision which he had concerning his Prophets. How he saw the Lord sitting on his Throne, and all the Host of Heaven standing by him, on his right hand, and on his left. And the Lord said, *Who will persuade Ahab, that he may go and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?* And one proposed one way, and another another. At last there came forth a Spirit and stood before the Lord, and said, *I will persuade him.* And the Lord said, *wherewith?* And the Spirit answered, *I will go forth, and be a lying Spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.* And he said, *Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also. Go forth, and do so.*

SUCH a consultation as this, was represented to the Prophet in his spiritual vision; not that the affair was really so transacted in the world of Spirits; for God who is Omnipotent and Omniscient, wants not to ask help or advice of his Creatures. But this is an easy, lively, and familiar way of acquainting us, that God in his just judgment had given up *Ahab* for a prey, to be seduced by a lying Spirit and false Prophets, to go and fall at *Ramoth-Gilead*. It was one and the same lying Spirit, which instructed all the four hundred Diviners how to answer *Ahab's* question. And no doubt but he dictated his answer to every one of them in the very same words; to the end that both they and their King might be persuaded by this uniformity of words, to believe that it was a true Oracle.

A learned man ingeniously observes, that in these words, *The Lord shall deliver Ramoth-Gilead into the hand of the king*, there is an ambiguity, and that the word *King* may mean the Syrian as well as the Israelite. And true it is, that those evil Spirits which were the Gods of the Heathen, delivered their Oracles in ambiguous terms to save their reputation.

putation. For not being endued with that foreknowledge of things which they pretended to, they framed their answers so artfully, as that they might be construed to comply with the event, whatever it might happen to be. And so the blame, in case of misadventure, was to rest, not upon the Oracle, but upon him who received it, and took it in a wrong sense. However, these ambiguities, in time, rendred the Oracles contemptible. And perhaps this was the reason why *Micaiah* made sport with this here before us. But this is certain, that the Spirit who dictated it, was a lying Spirit, for he plainly owned himself to be such. And his business was to excite *Ahab* to venture upon his own destruction; which he knew he might effect, by telling him a pleasing lie, and making all his Prophets unanimous in it.

WHEN *Micaiah* had made an end of speaking, *Ahab* and his Prophets were incensed above measure at him for what he had said. *Zedekiah*, who seems to have been the chief of the four hundred, struck him on the face; and the King remanded him to his prison, with a charge to the keeper to feed him with no better than a small quantity of bread and water, till *Israel* should return from the war victorious. And this being done, they proceeded to *Ramoth-Gilead*.

Now when they were come near the *Syrian* army, it was agreed between the two Kings, that *Ahab* should enter the battle in a disguise, like a subordinate officer, I suppose, for he rode in his chariot; but that *Jehoshaphat* should appear like himself, in the habit of a King. The reason of this is evident. *Ahab* knew that he should be chiefly aimed at, as the author of the war, and that it would presently end in favour of the *Syrians*, if he should be cut off. And indeed for these very reasons *Benhadad* had charged his captains, to fight

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neither with small nor great, save with the King of Israel. This brought Jehoshaphat into great danger of his life: For when the battle was joined, and the Syrians saw him in his royal apparel, they took him for the King of Israel, and pursued him with united forces. But when he behaved himself so, as to shew them they were mistaken, they left off pursuing him any farther. In 2 Chron. xviii. 31. it is said, that Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him, and moved the pursuers to depart from him. Which intimates, that his escape was narrow, and even miraculous; by which he was reprov'd for his great offence in joining alliance with an avowed enemy of God, and warn'd to be careful how he enter'd into such alliances for the future.

AHAB, mean while, was concealed under his disguise in another part of the field of battle. Concealed, I say, from the knowledge of men, but not from the eyes of God, who directed a random shot to find out a passage thro' the joints of his harness into his body, where it gave him his death's wound, tho' he died not immediately. As soon as he was wounded, he called out to his charioteer to drive him to some place out of the host, where he might have care taken of his wound without disturbance.

AND now he could be no longer concealed. The news of his disaster was quickly spread abroad thro' his army, to the great consternation no doubt of all his soldiers, who had been assured by him and his Prophets, that certain victory was decreed them from Heaven. But upon his shewing himself to them in his chariot, after his wound was dress'd, tho' too feeble to support himself without help, they did their utmost, by fighting gallantly before him, to raise his Spirits, and revive him again. But all in vain; there was no stopping of his blood; which by continually issuing out of the wound,



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wound, exhausted him so, that he died before the going down of the Sun.

THEN was fulfilled the vision of *Micaiah*, wherein he saw *Israel* scattered as sheep upon the Mountains, and returning home without their Master. For the *Israelites*, upon the death of their King, quitted the field; and the *Syrians* having obtained their end, in obedience to the command of their Master, did not pursue them.

THUS ended the life and reign of King *Ahab*; but this was but the beginning of those sufferings which were afterwards accomplished in his wife and children, and the more remote branches of his family. To die, as he did, in the field of battle, would scarce have deserved the name of a divine Judgment, if he had not gone to the war in contempt of God's warnings by the mouth of his Prophet. It certainly was a punishment which bore no manner of proportion to the black guilt of his sins.

FOR he sinned more than all the Kings of *Israel* that went before him. He so filled the land with idolatries, that the sin of *Jeroboam* was but a small one in comparison of his. By trampling upon the Law of God, demolishing his Altars, and killing or banishing his Prophets continually, he seemed to make it the full purpose of his heart and business of his life, to root out the Religion which he found established, and introduce Paganism in the room of it: But could any thing that is even feigned of the old Giants fighting against Heaven, exceed this impiety? For consider what a strict and manifold relation there was between God and the People of *Israel*; how he had magnified his loving-kindness to *Abraham* and the Patriarchs; in what a wonderful manner he brought them from among the *Egyptians*, and separated them from all other Nations, and raised them up a Law-

## § 2. SERMON XXXV. *On the*

giver, and Judges who settled them in the Land of *Canaan*, under such a Government in Church and State, as was brought down by expresse revelation from Heaven, and contrived on purpose to exclude any mixture of Paganism or foreign Worship. Consider how God delighted to style himself the King, the Father, the Husband of *Israel*; how he chose them for his peculiar people and heritage above all Nations of the Earth, how he placed his Name and Worship among them, as in a fountain-head, whence the streams of Salvation might flow in time to all the ends of the Earth. Let us, I say, compute the reasons we find in holy Writ, why *Israel* should be God's People, and he should be their God; and then let us be astonished to find that there ever arose such a King in *Israel* as this *Ahab*, who was so audacious as to fight against this God, to depose him from his dominion over *Israel*, to cast him out of his own Inheritance; to undo all that he had been doing for many hundreds of years past and gone; to bring back those abominations which had polluted the Land, and caused it to spue out its old inhabitants: An attempt of this kind was a sin of such a monstrous size, that there is no taking any measure of it; it surpasses all that we can imagine.

HOWEVER, let us carry as just an estimate of it as we can along with us, in reading the History of *Ahab* and his Family, and then we shall not wonder at the sanguinary executions which were done upon him root and branch, until that a full end was made of him. For it was fit that his punishment should be as notorious, as was his enmity against God.

THIS his enmity against God, made him an enemy to the World, and to himself, as it is natural for such abandoned wretches to be. What a horrid massacre did he commit upon *Naboth* and his

his Family, for the sake of his vineyard? which drew a heavy sentence upon him and his from the mouth of *Elijah*; and the divine Vengeance began to exact payment of him at this time. For after his death, as they were washing his bloody chariot in the pool of *Samaria*, the dogs were observed to lick his blood, according to the Prophet's word who had foretold this.

As to himself, he was his own great enemy; for he had lost the power of seeing that which was for his real benefit, even when it was set before his eyes. What a tedious famine did he chuse to bring upon himself and his people, rather than hearken to the word of *Elijah*, by which he might easily have prevented it? And if he had regarded *Micaiah* as a Prophet of the Lord, which he did not deny him to be, he had not ended his days at *Ramoth-Gilead*. But these Prophets spoke plain, undisguised truths, according to the real mind of God; which *Ahab* could not endure to hear. His delight was in those who always prophesied smooth things, who gave him a fair picture of his own merits and abilities, who spoke of his arms as invincible, and his success as infallible. These his admirers were his favourites and counsellors; and they took care so thoroughly to please him, as that in the end they ruined him.

THESE are fair warnings to us all, to be zealous for the Glory of God, and the sincere, impartial preaching of his word among us. The God of *Israel* is our God, for he is the Father of our Lord *Jesus Christ*; and consequently whatever he did for his people of old, is to be reckoned as done for us. The Miracles of Judgment and Mercy, of Power and Wisdom, which he wrought for them, he wrought for us; for they are standing monuments and evidences to us, that he is the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all the World. The



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Prophets which he sent to them he hath sent to us, by preserving their Books, and conveying them to us, and ordering them by his Providence to be a part of the daily service of our Church. And besides his Prophets, he hath sent us his Son, of whom all the Prophets had spoken, together with the Apostles and Ministers of his Gospel. And the pains which have been taken, the lives which have been sacrificed, the moneys which have been expended in building Schools, Churches, Colleges, and raising revenues for this purpose, that God might be made known upon Earth, and the way of Salvation taught according to his word, are far beyond any estimate we can make of them.

AND now after all the miraculous means which God hath used to reveal himself to us, shall any of us presume to say, that his revelations are not necessary, but that the light of nature, or the common sense and reason of mankind, are sufficient to teach us to serve God acceptably, and lead us to all the happiness that we are capable of enjoying? Those who take upon them to exalt Nature, or Reason, as they call it, against, and even above Revelation, as many in our wretched days are bold enough to do, are as great Idolaters, as great enemies of God, as ever *Ahab* was, and they discover the same Spirit as he was acted by, to abolish the Law of God, to destroy, or at least to alienate those structures which have been raised for the propagating and teaching of Religion, and to slay the Prophets with the sword; if not with a sword of iron and steel, yet with that of extreme indigence, with a sword of cold and nakedness, of reproach and contempt, which may be the cause of a natural, but never fails of occasioning a political death.

WHEREVER this Spirit of *Ahab* has prevailed, to the dethroning of God and his Laws and  
Worship

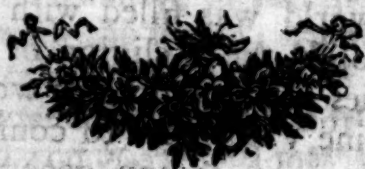
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Worship in any Country, the consequences have been the same as happened to *Israel*: The Land has mourned under the scourge of famine, war, or some other desolating calamity, as might abundantly be shewed in the ancient Kingdoms of *Israel* and *Judah*, and other Countries, which once were the joy of the whole Earth, while they maintained the worship of the true God among them; but when, for their lukewarmness and infidelity they were over-run with the arms and superstitions of the *Mahometans*, the honour of their cities was soon laid in the dust, and their sweet liberty, peace and plenty, and other enjoyments, were exchanged for the yoke of slavery, oppression, and hardships of all sorts.

THIS should be a warning to us all, to hold fast the profession of our Christian Faith without waverings; and to account them our worst enemies, who are the declared enemies of *Jesus Christ*, who make it their endeavour to root out his Religion from amongst us. They are the contrivers not only of our eternal, but temporal damnation. For while they labour to deprive us of our Christian Ministry, and to extinguish the light of the Gospel in our Land, what are they doing, but opening a door to all the Legions of darkness, to pour in upon us, and confound us? What are they aiming at, but to let loose the reins to all the abominable lusts which our corrupt nature is capable of, and which render us odious to God and good men? If our world was filled with such people, as study to abolish the Religion of *Jesus Christ*, their blasphemies and corruptions would certainly awaken the divine Vengeance to consume them by as terrible judgments, as any generation of men ever suffered since the creation. They would quickly turn their habitations into a hell of misery as well as impiety. For to do that, there would

need no more than the Hand of God against them; and it must be against them, as much as it is against the reprobate Spirits, whose image and similitude they have taken upon them by fighting against Heaven. We suffer too much from them as it is, in that imperfect state of Religion which their unhappy mixture among us, hath left us; tho' the blessings of Heaven are not quite withdrawn from us, yet they are much impaired by those horrid blasphemies which provoke God to turn away the light of his countenance from us.

LET us therefore (if we desire to live even in the present state of things) let us beseech God to deliver us from false Prophets and lying Spirits, which have always been the ruin of the Country where they have prevailed: And let us pray, that God would endue the Ministers of his Religion with such an Apostolick Spirit, that they would suppress nothing of his revealed will, but preach it with such zeal, plainness, and sincerity, as may cause God to be known amongst us, and make the way of salvation easy and delightful, that we serving him as obedient children, may obtain the rewards of our obedience, even the blessings of this life, and of that which is to come, thro' *Jesus Christ* our Lord, &c.







# SERMON XXXVI.

*On the Eleventh Sunday after TRINITY.*



2 KINGS ix. 1, 2, 3.

*And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramoth-Gilead. And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber. Then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not.*

N the nineteenth Chapter of the former Book we read how God commanded *Elijah* to do this thing, which we here find done fifteen years after by his successor *Elisha*. Whereupon it may be demanded how it came to be so long neglected. Some

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Some think that *Elijah* anointed *Jehu* presently after he had received directions about it, only to give him an earnest of the Sovereignty, as *Samuel* had given to *David*, without putting him into the immediate possession of it. But there is not the least ground in sacred Writ for this opinion. It is more agreeable to what we find written, to say, that *Ahab's* humiliation for the murder of *Naboth*, had moved God to defer the judgment pronounced upon his family, to this time. The execution of it was left to *Elisba*, who did not go about it in his own person, as being too well known to perform it with secrecy, and not young and nimble enough to make a quick escape after the work was done.

For this purpose therefore he chuses out of the school or college of the Prophets, an active young man, and gives him a box of oil in his hand, and sends him to *Ramoth-Gilead* to anoint *Jehu*, the General of the *Israelitish* forces, King over *Israel*.

THE *Jews* think (as their opinion is represented by a learned Commentator) that none of the Kings of *Israel* were anointed, but either at the first promotion of a family to the Throne, or when there was a question about the succession. For had it not been for the faction of *Adonijah*, there had been no need of *Solomon's* unction. The reason why *Jehu* was anointed at this time, was, because the succession was to be translated out of the right line of the house of *Ahab*, into his family, which had no right to the Kingdom but merely by the divine Appointment.

THE young Prophet, being fully perswaded that this was the Will of God, and that he would protect him in this hazardous enterprize of anointing a new King over *Israel*, while *Joram* was yet living, went to *Ramoth-Gilead*, which was now in the hands of the *Israelites*. For *Joram*, pursuing the

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the war which his Father *Ahab* had begun, proved more successful in it, and had recovered this City from the *Syrians*. But having received many wounds in his rencounters with the enemy, he was returned to his palace in *Jezebel* to be healed of them, and had left his Captains, of whom *Jehu* was chief, to maintain his conquest against *Heracl* King of *Syria*. When the Prophet came thither, the Captains were sitting in a room together: He went boldly in to them, and looking upon *Jehu*, desired him to step aside with him, for that he had a secret to impart to him. *Jehu*, to prevent any mistake, bid him say plainly who it was that he wanted to speak with; and upon his repeating it, that he would speak with him, *Jehu* stepped aside with him into a private room.

When they two were together alone, the Prophet took out his box of oil, and poured some of it on *Jehu's* head, saying, *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I have anointed thee King over the people of the Lord, even over Israel*. Then he told him for what purpose it was, that he had invested him with this power; viz. That he might execute God's Judgements upon the house of *Ahab*, for the cruel murders which they had committed upon his Prophets, and upon *Naboth* and other good men. For which murders, as well as for their idolatries and outrageous offences against the worship of God, this family was devoted to be cut off, as the houses of *Jeroboam* and *Baasha* had been cut off before them: And that *Jezabel* should come to the most shameful end, as being the most guilty of all the family.

As soon as the Prophet had given this charge, he tarried not for *Jehu's* answer, but opened the door, and fled away with all speed, as his Master *Elisha* had commanded him, lest what he had done should be discovered, and the rest of the Captains might apprehend him for treason against the reign-

*of Jezebel*



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ing King. This, humanly speaking, was a just precaution, tho' the event presently shewed that no man there would have laid hands on him.

When he was gone, *Jehu* returned to his company, with a great concern, no doubt, in his countenance, which they justly imputed to something which he had heard from that messenger. Whereupon they asked him what that strange man had said to him. He answered, *Ye know the man, and his communication*; intimating his suspicion, that he thought they had listened and overheard all that had passed. But when they utterly denied it, he frankly told them, that the man was a Prophet, and had anointed him in the Name of the Lord to be King over *Israel*, on purpose to execute the divine Judgments upon the house of *Abab*, as above. This they no sooner heard, but they all unanimously consented (so powerfully did God move their hearts) to acknowledge *Jehu* for their King; which they might do with the greater freedom, because King *Joram*, as I noted before, was gone from *Ramoth-Gilead* to *Jezreel*. In this disposition the Captains suddenly raised a Throne and Canopy, which they composed of their own robes, and set *Jehu* thereon, and proclaimed him King with sound of Trumpet.

This was an auspicious beginning; but *Jehu* told them, that if they would make the best of their own advantages, they should set watchmen at the gates of *Ramoth-Gilead*, who should suffer none to go out of the City, and carry the news of what they were doing to *Joram* in *Jezreel*; for that it would be their best way to go themselves with all expedition, and surprize him before he knew any thing of the matter.

Accordingly, *Jehu* ordered his chariot to be got ready, and took a good company of his friends and soldiers, and drove with all speed along the road to *Jezreel*.  
Now

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NOW it was the custom in those days, that at whatsoever City or Town the King happened to be, a watchman stood upon the tower or highest place in the City, to look out, and give notice if he saw any one coming in haste, that the King might not be surprized with any sudden misadventure.

THE watchman at *Jezreel* had got sight of *Jehu* and his company, as soon as they came within his view, and gave notice to those below, who acquainted the King that a company of soldiers were upon the road from *Ramoth-Gilead*. *Joram* sent out a horseman to meet them, and see if all were well at *Ramoth*. Who when he came up, asked, *Is it peace?* *Jehu* bid him not trouble himself about peace, but come into his rear, and follow him; which he durst not refuse to do, seeing there were many horsemen, and he could not escape them. And just so he served a second messenger; which when the watchman of *Jezreel*, who observed all that passed, had reported, together with his opinion, that he took the chief man to be *Jehu*; King *Joram*, together with his nephew *Abaziah* King of *Judah*, who was come to visit him, took each of them their chariot, and went out to meet *Jehu*. And as the Providence of God ordered it, they met him in the very plat of ground in the suburbs of *Jezreel*, which *Abab* their Ancestor had taken from *Naboth*. When they came up with him, *Joram* called out to him, and asked him if all things were well and in a peaceable state. But *Jehu*, who came to do the execution which God's Prophet had injoin'd him not many hours before, answered roughly, *What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts are so many?* Whoredoms properly denote corporal defilements, and by a figure they are used to signify idolatry. For God is as a husband  
band

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band to his Church, and they his Spouse. When therefore they worship idols, they forsake the true Husband, and prostitute themselves to adulterers. In this spiritual sense the words whoredom, fornication, and adultery, are often used in Scripture. Many are of opinion that *Jezabel* was an adulteress as well as an idolatress; and being thus abandoned to the two greatest of sins, no wonder if she was enticed by those reprobate Spirits with whom she communicated, in the infernal arts of sorcery and witchcraft, which are here laid to her charge, and meant, I don't question, in a literal sense.

*JORAM*, upon hearing the words of *Jehu*, and perceiving that he intended violence, turned his chariot and fled for his life, crying out to his kinsman *Abaziah*, that they were betrayed. But *Jehu* discharged an arrow with his full strength, which shot *Joram* thro' the heart, so that immediately he fell down dead in his chariot. And that his servants might not carry him away and bury him in the City, *Jehu* ordered one of his own companions in arms to take the body, and throw it into some ditch or pit in *Naboth's* vineyard. For, says he, you may remember, that when you and I rode in the guards of his father *Abah*, when he came to take possession of this vineyard, the Lord passed this sentence upon him and his by the prophet *Elijah*, I have seen the blood of *Naboth* and the blood of his sons which thou hast cruelly shed for the sake of this vineyard; and I will surely requite it upon thee in this place. Now therefore let us cast him into that ditch, and fulfil the divine threatening. And this was the end of *Joram*, the second son of *Abah*, and the second after him in the throne of *Israel*. For his elder brother *Abaziah* died without any son, by a fall which he had in his palace at *Samaris*.

As for *Abaziah* King of *Judah*, who was now in company with *Joram*, when he saw the fate of his



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his uncle, he fled, as he had reason, the way toward *Samarit*, for he had no hope of getting into his own Kingdom. But *Jehu* called out to his men to strike him in his chariot. They did so, and wounded him, but not so as to dispatch him upon the spot. But his horses being too fleet for his pursuers, he escaped to *Megiddo*, and tarried there for a while: Whence his servants quickly removed him to *Samarit*, which was hard by, and a safer place, and there he concealed himself for some time. But it is said, *2 Chron. xxii.* that *Jehu* sent men thither to make search for him, and that they found him out, and brought him to *Jehu*; at whose command they slew him, and gave his body to his servants, who carried him to *Jerusalem*, and buried him in the royal sepulcher there, by *Jehu's* allowance, because he was descended from the good King *Jehoshaphat*.

BUT when I call *Jehoshaphat* a good King, I must except that action of his which brought his grandson to this miserable end: It was the affinity which he contracted with the house of *Ahab*, by marrying his son and heir *Joram*, to *Ataliab* the daughter of *Ahab*. 'Tis very likely he did this with a view to maintain peace and a good understanding between the two Kingdoms of *Israel* and *Judah*. But whatever success he might have this way, 'tis plain that he displeased God by this alliance, and in the main he paid dear for it. For first, he had like to have lost his life in joining forces with *Ahab* to recover *Ramoth-Gilead*: And heard a melancholy sentence from *Jehu* the son of *Hanani* the Prophet, who went to him upon that occasion, and expostulated with him, saying, *Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.* Secondly, When afterwards he assisted this *Joram* the son of *Ahab*, against the  
King

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King of *Moab*, 2 *Kings* iii. he was in great danger of perishing for want of water. Thirdly, When he went partner with *Abaziah*, *Abab*'s eldest son, in building a fleet which was to sail to *Ophir* for gold, *Eliezer* prophesied against him, saying, *Because thou hast joined thy self with Abaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works*: And the ships were so shattered at the port at *Ezion-Geber*, where they were made, that they were not able to sail. Fourthly, When his son *Jehoram*, whom he had married to *Abab*'s daughter, succeeded him in the throne of *Judah*, he presently embraced the idols of her family, as it often happens in such marriages; and slew all his brethren, even six Princes, the sons of his Father, which he is thought to have done at the instigation of his wife *Athaliah*, that they might make no opposition to the establishment of her idolatry. Fifthly, This alliance of *Jehoshaphat* with the house of *Abab*, was the destruction of his grandson *Abaziah*, by the hand of *Jehu*, as before related. Lastly, when *Athaliah* the mother of *Abaziah* saw that this her son was dead, she made it her business to destroy all the royal branches of the house of *David*, 2 *Kings* xi. such children, I suppose, as her husband had by other wives; or any in general who were not descended from her self. So that, as I said before, *Jehoshaphat* paid dear for his affinity with the house of *Abab*. And just was it in God, thus to punish him. All his personal misfortunes, and the tragedies in his family, were owing to this one presumptuous sin, his marrying the heir of his Kingdom into a profane idolatrous family; whereby he manifestly exposed the true Religion of his whole Kingdom to the utmost hazard. For even an Idiot could have told him, that an idolatrous wife was very likely to pervert an orthodox husband. He could not be so inconsiderate as not to think of this,  
and

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and foresee it. And therefore the small regard which he paid to this consideration, was an argument of his supine neglect, to say no worse, of the continuance of the worship and fear of the true God in his Family and Kingdom.

SOME are of opinion that *Jehu* exceeded his commission in killing *Abaziah* King of *Judah*. But in justification of him, it must be observed, *First*, That his commission was general, to cut off the whole house of *Abab* without exception; and this King was of his house by the mother's side. *Secondly*, *Abaziah* did evil in the sight of the Lord, like the house of *Abab*; he served *Baal* as they did: For his mother and relations of that side were his counsellors, as is expressly affirm'd 2 *Chron.* xxii. *Thirdly*, 'Tis here likewise said, that *the destruction of Abaziah was of God*, who so ordered it, that he should be visiting *Joram* just at that time, when God had anointed *Jehu*, and commanded him to arise and cut off the house of *Abab*. So that his partaking of the same blood, and the same idolatries with *Joram*, were the occasions of his perishing by the same judgment with him.

*JEHU* having thus cut off the branches, proceeds to the root. He enters *Jezreel*, and as he rode along the street, *Jezebel*, in a dress unsuitable for her at any time, especially upon this occasion, looked out at her window, and called to him in a way of reproach, saying, *Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?* The History of this *Zimri* may be found 1 *Kings* xvi. where it appears, that he was servant of *Elab* King of *Israel*, and a captain of his chariots: Against whom he conspired, and taking his opportunity, when *Elab* was drinking himself drunk at his steward's house at *Tirzah*, he went in, and smote him and killed him, and reigned in his stead. *Zimri* kill'd not only *Elab*, but all the family of *Baasha* his Father, he left



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none of his kinsfolk or friends alive, but destroyed them all, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by *Jehu* the Prophet: *For all the sins of Baasha and of Elah his son, by which they made Israel to sin: i. e. they were very bad Governors; and as such God had threatned them by his Prophet, and executed his threatnings by Zimri.* But his case and *Jehu's* were very different, especially in two respects. *First*, In that *Zimri*, tho' he executed what God had threatned, yet he had no design to serve God in it, he had no commission from him to do it; whereas *Jehu* was anointed of God King over *Israel*, for this very purpose, that he should destroy the house of *Ahab*. *Secondly*, *Zimri* having no design to reform any of the sins of his predecessor, God cut him short, for he reigned but seven days: Whereas *Jehu*, tho' he did not work a thorough reformation, yet he did good service in rooting out the idolatry of *Baal* which *Jezebel* had brought in. For which reason he and his family were established in the Kingdom to the fourth Generation.

AND therefore when *Jezebel* upbraided *Jehu* with *Zimri's* treason, as tho' what the one did against the house of *Ahab*, were as unwarrantable as the other's acting against the family of *Baasha*; she either did not know, or would not acknowledge, the great difference between them, viz. that *Jehu* had the divine Authority on his side, which made that a Duty in him, which in *Zimri* was contrary to Law and Duty, for want of such authority.

*JEHU* returned no answer to this reproach; but called out to those who were about *Jezebel*, to throw her out at the window, which they did; and she was dashed to pieces on the pavement, and he rode over her, and trod her under foot. Then he went in to eat and drink; and presently  
sent

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sent to see for the body of *Jezebel*, in order to give it burial: But those whom he sent, could find no more of her, than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. Which when they had told him, he presently recollected the prophecy of *Elijah*, which he seems to have forgot before; *That the dogs should eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and that her carcase should lie there as dung upon the face of the field, so mangled and devoured, that men should not be able to say, This is Jezebel.*

UPON the whole, this Chapter affords us a most pregnant proof of the truth of Prophecy, and the certainty of the divine Threatnings. For when this sentence which was now executed, was first pronounced near fifteen years before, *Ahab* and his family were then in a flourishing condition. However, when he heard it, he did not make light of it, but put himself in mourning, and was much afflicted about it: Which moved God to defer it longer than he first intended. *I will not, says he, bring the evil in his days, but in his sons days.* And how punctually and surprizingly all was fulfilled upon his sons, we have heard: And may farther observe how immediately their destruction came from Heaven. For it is reasonable to think that *Jehu* had hitherto merited well of the house of *Ahab*, otherwise they would not have advanced him so high, as to have made him chief captain of the army. And it is as likely that he would have still continued the same obedience and kind services to them, had he not been discharged from such duty by the express Oracle of God, had he not been raised by him to the royal Dignity, on purpose that *Ahab's* family might be deposed and destroyed. But when he was once anointed and called of God to this work, we see what a change it made in him, and in all the rest of the Captains that were about him, so that they went as readily

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against their Master *Abab's* family, as if he had been a common enemy.

Is not this a plain demonstration, that Princes reign by the will of God, that he sets up one and puts down another, and turns the hearts and affections of men to favour such changes as he sees fit? So that he who has the power, shall fall; and he who has no power shall rise up, and rule in his stead, whenever the most High decrees that it shall be so.

LET no man therefore glory in his abundance of friends, riches and honours, or despair in the want of them: For they are but secondary causes of the happiness of this life. Of themselves they are not able to help or hinder this happiness. They are all at the command and disposal of him, who is the only fountain of goodness, who gives them the virtue and faculty of serving us, and without whose blessing they are all insipid, worthless, helpless vanities. Or rather the best of them are so many poisons and arrows of death, to consume us from off the face of the Earth, when by our rebellion against God, we make our selves the objects of his hatred and indignation.

WAS it any protection to *Jezebel*, that she was the daughter, the wife, the mother of Kings? Did her powerful alliances support her in her war against the King of Heaven? No doubt but she reckoned much upon her advantages, that she was above the Laws, and might, without asking any ones leave, bring the Gods of her own Country into the Land of *Israel*. And to tell her that this Land was the heritage of another God, was but to move her scorn and contempt. Perhaps too she despised his threatnings of what he would do to her and her family, as looking upon the execution to be impossible. And she triumphed for some years in doing her own pleasure. But how bitter



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bitter was all this in the end? All that had been threatned was executed at last, with as much shame and ignominy, as could have lighted upon the meanest family. And that which added to this calamity was, that it was executed by the hands of her own subjects.

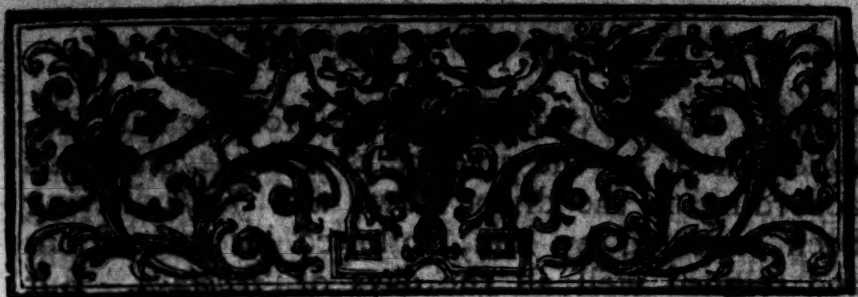
CAN Princes hope that men will have the grace to live in subjection to them, while they themselves are rebelling against the great Sovereign of all the World, by whose Power they reign, and for whose Glory they ought to govern? *Jezebel* was mistaken, when she thought her self mistress of the chariots and horsemen of *Israel*; the God of *Israel*, whom she had reproached and blasphemed, had them all at his disposal, and when he saw fit, he made them her enemies, and turned their arms against her.

LET not then the greatest earthly Potentates neglect the Honour and Worship of God; for in so doing they neglect their own safety, since it is he alone who subdueth their people under them, and uniteth the unruly wills and affections of men in the bonds of subjection and obedience. Not but that publick blessings are many times vouchsafed to the unthankful and unholy; to those who forsake the ways of God, and put away the knowledge of him far from them. But when God comes to reckon with them, as he always doth sooner or later, they pay dear for their abused mercies. Thus the houses of *Jeroboam*, of *Baasha*, and *Ahab*, were for a time the greatest in *Israel*; but being found enemies of God, they were visited with such judgments as made them an astonishment and proverb of misery to all men, and blotted out their name from the face of the Earth.

To conclude; Let us all, from the highest to the lowest, lay up in our hearts that saying of God to *Eli*, *Those that honour me, I will honour; and*  
F 3 — they

they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed. Let us be assured, that this is the rule of his dealings with mankind, not in some few, but numberless instances. Let this open our eyes to see their fatal delusion, who would persuade us that sins against God, prophanations of his Name, neglects of his Worship, abuses of sacred Things, are not destructive both of our bodies and souls. If such sinners are spared for the present, it is but in order to their more grievous and exemplary punishment. They are treasuring up wrath against the day of Wrath and revelation of the righteous Judgment of God: Who hath decreed that proud and presumptuous sinners shall be mightily tormented; but that the merciful shall obtain mercy, the humble shall be exalted, the meek shall inherit the Earth; that he that seeketh the Lord, shall find him, that he who ordereth his conversation aright, shall obtain the salvation of God, thro' *Jesus Christ* our Lord, to whom, &c.





# SERMON XXXVII.

*On the Twelfth Sunday after TRINITY.*



2 KINGS xviii. 4.

*He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.*



WE lately heard how *Jehoshaphat* King of *Judah* married *Joram* his son and heir to *Athaliah* the daughter of *Ahab* King of *Israel*, and by that alliance opened a door for the admission of *Jezebel's* Idolatry into his Kingdom. And quickly was *Baal* exalted in *Judah*, and became the Idol of *Joram* the husband, and *Ahaziah* the son of this marriage. Some short check was given to the progress of this Idolatry in the reign of *Joash*, the third in succession, who coming to the Crown at seven years old, was under the tuition of *Jehoiada* the High-priest, who had married his aunt, and  
F 4 being



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being a man of courage and zeal for the true Religion, kept up the practice of it for several years according to the divine Law; and *Joash*, having been educated by him, followed his instructions and reigned well all the days of *Jeboiada*. But when he was dead, the Princes of *Judah* got free access to the King, and corrupted him so, that he forsook the house of God, and served groves and idols. Then the Spirit of God came upon *Zechariah* the son of *Jeboiada*, and his successor in the Priests office, who expostulated with them, saying, *Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, to cause him to forsake you, and deliver you up to your enemies?* But they fell upon him at the King's commandment, and stoned him to death in the court of the Lord's House. To revenge whose death, God sent an army of *Syrians* upon *Judah* and *Jerusalem*, who destroyed the Princes, and reduced *Joash* to such a miserable condition, that his own servants conspired against him and slew him: And his son *Amaziah* reigned in his stead. This son, like the father, begun well, and ended ill, and came to the like untimely death, by the hands of his own people. *Uzziah* his son was a King of much the same character. *Jotham*, the next in order, is said to have done well, but it could be but in some particulars: It is a great abatement to his goodness, that he entred not into the Temple of the Lord, and that his people followed their old evil ways. As for *Abaz*, his son and successor, he was so far from doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord, that he walked in the idolatrous ways of the Kings of *Israel*, and made molten images for *Baalim*. He also burnt incense in the valley of the son of *Hinnom*, and made his children pass through the fire, after the abominations of the Heathen, and sacrificed in the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

AND

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AND he still did more wickedly; for when God raised up the *Syrians* against him to scourge him, even then he sacrificed unto the Gods of *Damascus* which smote him: And said, *Because the Gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me.* For which purpose I suppose it was, that he took a pattern of an altar at *Damascus*, and ordered one to be built at *Jerusalem* after the same form, upon which he offered all kind of sacrifices.

NOW after such a race of Kings as we have here seen, of which the best were but negligent observers of God's Law, and the worst extremely bad, it must needs affect every pious heart with joy and wonder, to see such a King as *Hezekiah* rise up like a glorious Sun after a long season of Clouds and Darknes; that coming of such degenerate Ancestors, and especially of such an idolatrous Father, he should presently reform the Church and State of *Judah* so exactly, as if *David* himself had been returned from the other world, and were again upon the throne: That he should have zeal and courage enough to remove the high places, to break the images, to cut down the groves, and to demolish the brazen serpent which the children of *Israel* had long idolized, by burning incense to it. The reformation of so many practices, which tho' corrupt in themselves, yet by length of time had got the face of religious Duties, was no easy matter to bring about. Some of them were as old as the reign of King *Solomon*, who after he had done gloriously in building a Temple to the God of his Fathers, sullied his religious character by building high places, in compliment to his wives, to the false Deities of *Moab* and *Ammon*. And tho' *Asa* his great grandson endeavoured to reduce Religion to the condition it was in in *David's* time, and destroyed all the Idols  
of

## 74 SERMON XXXVII. *On the*

of his father and his mother, yet the high places were not removed; but the people offered sacrifice and burnt incense in them, during his and his son *Jehoshaphat's* reign; so that the praise of suppressing these high places was reserved for *Hezekiah*; none of those I have reckoned up, which went before him, ever did this, or so much as attempted it, that I read of.

As for these high places, I believe that in some reigns they were used only for the exercise of the true Religion. But that even so they were abused to illegal practices, is evident from what we read in the account of them, that the people sacrificed and burnt incense in them, which they should not have done any where but on the altar in *Jerusalem*. For thus their Law enjoined them, *Deut. xii.* utterly to destroy all the places wherein the old inhabitants had served their Gods, upon the high mountains, upon the hills, and under every green tree: to overthrow their altars, break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; to cut down the graven images of their Gods, and destroy the names of them out of their places. But, says he, *unto the place which the Lord your God shall chuse out of all the Tribes, to put his name there, even to his habitation shall ye seek, and thither shall ye come: and thither shall ye bring your burnt-offerings and sacrifices, and tythes, and heave-offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your free-will-offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks.*

You see how strictly their Law enjoined them to offer all their sacrifices at *Jerusalem*; and this injunction is repeated and earnestly inculcated. So that it was not enough for them to say, they sacrificed to none but the true God in the high places; for they were not allowed to sacrifice there upon any account whatever: I mean, in the Kingdom of *Judah*, where the people had free liberty to go



*Twelfth Sunday after TRINITY. 75*

up to *Jerusalem*. I confess, in *Israel*, where they were deprived of this liberty by *Jeroboam* and his Successors, God seems to have dispensed with this Law, and to have been pleased with Sacrifices offered in such high places, as were dedicated to his worship only. For which reason idolatrous Kings destroyed those places; which gave occasion to that complaint of the Prophet *Elijah*, that they had thrown down God's altars, meaning such altars as these; for they had not, they could not meddle with that at *Jerusalem*. But *Hezekiah* is praised for destroying the high places of *Judah*; and it is noted as an abatement of the character of some of his predecessors, that tho' in other respects they governed according to God's Law, yet they suffered these high places to stand, and the people to sacrifice in them; *Hezekiah* therefore excelled them in this, that he removed them.

THERE was great reason, no doubt, why God prohibited his people to sacrifice in them. One was, because they were so extreme prone to idolatry. And he foresaw they would abuse these places, as afterwards they did, and as *Ezekiel* complains, vi. 12. that they placed their idols round about their altars, upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak, where they offered sweet savours to all their idols. I confess they did not always commit these provocations in such places; but the temptations and opportunities to commit them were always the same; which made it reasonable that they should be wholly forbid them.

Secondly, In such places, tho' they were right in the object of their worship, yet they might be guilty of many ill practices in the form and manner of it. They might offer sower sacrifices, and less perfect in their kind, than the Law required. They might rob God and his Priests of those portions which

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which were peculiarly appropriated to them. Whereas at *Jerusalem* these things were publickly and carefully looked into, so that there was not room for those frauds which might pass unobserved in private places. Lastly, I doubt not but one great end which God had in obliging his people to sacrifice at *Jerusalem*, was, that he might preserve an Uniformity of worship in his Church, that his people might not set up altar against altar, and thence grow into emulations and contentions about their Religion, and consequently be divided into little petty sects and factions. Of what great account this religious Unity was held in ancient times, we read in the History of the *Reubenites*, and *Gadites*, and half Tribe of *Manasseh*, related *Josbua* xxii. These people chose their inheritance out of *Canaan*, on the other side *Jordan*. And when they took possession of it, they built an altar on the bank of *Jordan*, just at the place where the *Israelites* had passed over it. When this was told to the *Israelites* in *Canaan*, they sent an embassy of the Princes of the Tribes to expostulate with these their Brethren, saying, *What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, in building you an altar that ye might rebel against him? If the land of your inheritance be unclean, pass over unto us, and take your portion here where the Lord's tabernacle dwells: But rebel not against our God and us, by building you an altar, beside the altar of the Lord our God.* To this the accused answered with the most solemn protestations, 'That they had not built their altar with a design to offer any manner of sacrifice upon it; but only that it might be a witness for them in time to come, when their brethrens children might possibly challenge their children to show what right they had to be numbred with the people of the Lord, and object to them as dwelling beyond *Jordan*, that they

‘ they were out of the bounds of the Lord’s inheritance; therefore said the accused, We have built this altar, not for burnt-offerings nor sacrifice; but that it might be a witness between us and you, and our generations after us, that we have a right to bring our offerings before the Lord; and that if your children shall question ours about it, or offer to hinder them from sacrificing to the Lord, that then our children may plead this altar, and say, *Behold the pattern of the altar of the Lord, which our fathers made, not for burnt-offerings nor sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you, that we are all the people of the same God.* This is all we intend by it: God forbid that we should rebel against him, and turn from following him, to build an altar for any sacrifice, besides the altar of the Lord God that is before his tabernacle.’ And with this answer the ambassadors were very well satisfied.

Now this, as I said before, shews the mind of God, and the zeal of his People to keep up an Unity of Religion in all their Tribes. For the builders of this altar in dispute, are not accused as if hereby they intended to change the object of their worship, and to sacrifice to some other God beside the God of *Israel*: They are only questioned for erecting an altar besides that which was before the Tabernacle of the Lord, as if they intended to divide their Church, and exercise their Religion separately from the rest of their brethren. Such a division both accusers and accused call a *rebellion against God, a turning away from following him*: And that justly, because his Law had appointed but one altar for the sacrifices of all the twelve Tribes, as I noted from *Deut. xii.* And therefore *Hezekiah* acted according to the will of God, and the truly religious Constitution of his Country, when he destroyed the altars of high places,



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places, because such religious Services were performed at them, as were by the divine Law peculiarly appropriated to the Tabernacle and Temple.

2dly, *Hozekiah* brake in pieces the images, statues, and pillars which were erected in these groves, which make it plain that at that time some of them at least were places of idolatrous worship. But which way could images find hands to make them, or places to receive them, in the Kingdom of *Judab*, where that Law of God was professed, which utterly forbad the making of them? To read of images in *Israel* can be no great surprize, especially in and after the reign of uxorious *Ahab*, who to make way for his wife's Religion, forsook the Law of God, broke down his Altars, and slew his Prophets with the sword, and constituted the Priests of *Baal* the Bishops and Fathers of his Church. But a short reflection will show us, that by an unhappy match which *Jehoshaphat* most unadvisedly made for his son and successor with a daughter of *Ahab*, the *Sidonian* idolatry quickly filled the high places of *Judab* with images: So that, as the Prophet *Ezekiel* complains, they were placed round about their Altars, as Deities who were to be entertained with their sacrifices. And the same Prophet, in his xxiii chap. under the parable of *Abelab* and *Abolibah* affirms, that the idolatry of *Judab* was even more gross than that of *Israel*. Only *Judab* was now and then blessed with a better King than *Israel*, whom God raised up, and inspired with a zeal against these idols, to throw them into the fire, and to restore the true order and method of divine Worship. And such a King was *Hozekiah*.

BUT besides the images of the Heathen round about, there was a piece of superstition peculiar to the *Jews*, which called aloud for the hand of a Reformer to put it out of the way; and that was

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the brazen serpent, which Moses, by God's direction, had made in the wilderness, to heal the people when they were stung by serpents, and which they had preserved to this time, as a standing monument of such deliverance.

Who could have imagined that this antidote would ever have been turned into deadly poison, and this brazen serpent have stung worse than those in the wilderness? Yet so it happened, that the people at this time had taken it into the number of their Gods, and with great devotion burnt incense before it.

WHEN this practice begun, it does not appear: The words of my Text sound, as if it had been always. For unto those days, it is said, the children of Israel burnt incense to it. But we can hardly think they were known to do this in the days of Moses, Joshua, the Judges, or the first Kings of Israel. For then it had been abolished, or at least removed out of sight, long before this time. And therefore we must, with learned men, date the beginning of this from the time when other idolatries begun to prevail in Judah, which, as we noted above, was towards the end of Solomon's reign.

IN such circumstances, when the peoples hearts were set upon idols, it is easy to conceive for what reason they idolized this brazen serpent. For it being written in the Law of Moses, *Whosoever looks upon it, shall live*, they fancied that as the sight of it healed their ancestors when bitten by serpents, so there still resided a divine Virtue and Spirit in it, which would be helpful to them under other misfortunes. Certainly they were perswaded, that there was something divine contained under this figure, as appears by the words of *Hozekiah*, when he broke it in pieces, and called upon the people to view the inside well, and they would find no such

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such extraordinary matter as they fancied in it. *This*, said he, *is Nebushtan*, i. e. 'common brass, 'no other than what you have in the furniture of 'your houses. Why then will you so miserably 'cheat your selves and dishonour your God, as 'to think that such figures can of themselves convey the blessings of Heaven to you, and merit 'your sacrifices and adorations?' Thus *Hezekiah* convinced the *Jews* of their senseless idolatry in this particular. And he not only broke it to pieces, but ground it to powder, as is supposed, and scattered it amongst the dust of the Earth, that the people might not make a superstitious use of any of the fragments of it.

NOR does our Saviour's allusion to this serpent in the Gospel, make it of any greater account to us Christians. He never intended to have it understood as a type of himself. It is more properly a figure of the Destroyer than the Saviour of mankind: He only alludes to the erection of it as a fit resemblance of his crucifixion, that as this figure was raised on high, for the healing of all that should look upon it, so Christ should be lifted up on a cross, that all men who should believe him to be the *Messiah*, notwithstanding his crucifixion, should not perish by the wound given them by the old serpent in paradise, but should be healed of it so as to live for ever. In this the resemblance between them was exact and pertinent. And by this comparison our Lord gave an early and sensible intimation of what death he should die, and for what reason. This is sufficiently understood by a verbal comparison, without seeing the figure of this serpent. So that *Hezekiah* hath done us no wrong by breaking it in pieces, but hath rather prevented some superstitious Christians from idolizing this brazen serpent, as the *Jews* had done before them.

AND



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AND thus we have seen *Hezekiah's* zeal for the glory of God, wherein he excelled all his predecessors, from King *David* to his own time, and approved himself to be a King after God's own heart, worthy to sit on the throne of *Judah*. Whose Kings were bound to be very diligent in the study of God's Law, that they might know how to govern their people by the precepts of it: According to that ordinance of *Moses* which we read *Deut. xvii.* in these words; *When the King sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, he shall transcribe a copy of the law for himself out of the book of the priests and levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, and to do them.* This was part of the coronation oath of the Kings of *Judah*; but alas, how little considered by most of them! Some of them were professed enemies of God, and others very negligent defenders of his Religion; and why were they such? because instead of giving the Book of the Law a daily perusal, they wholly neglected it, and suffered it to be thrown into holes and corners, and buried amongst lumber, as their history assures us.

BUT such was not King *Hezekiah*; he took care, according to the example of holy *David*, to know the Law of God, and to do it. *First*, he acquainted himself with the true intent and meaning of it, and then he notified his resolution to his Court and Kingdom, that they should all observe it. In which he manifested a Spirit fit to reign in difficult times. For he threw aside all the pleas and excuses which his predecessors had made, and which are too fashionable upon such occasions: *That the times would not bear a thorough reformation: That the King of Assyria, whose tributaries they were, would take occasion from their reli-*

18 . . . . .  
**22 SERMON XXXVII. On the**

gious Divisions to break in upon them, and reduce them to a Province of his Empire. *Hezekiah* did not excuse himself by such plausible arguments from doing the will of his God. No; he took care in the first place to restore the uniformity and beauty of true Religion, and then he relied upon God for the success of his secular affairs. He threw off the yoke of the King of *Affyria*, in confidence that God would support him in the liberty he asserted, because he kept his Commandments. And he took a very right method, to make his peace with God in the first place, and then not to fear what man could do against him. For his impartial obedience justly entitled him to the divine Favour and Protection. And the event answered his hopes; the forces of the *Affyrians* which invaded him, were cut off by a special hand from Heaven.

THIS is a great encouragement to the Princes and Rulers of the Earth, to seek the glory of God, and establish his Laws, in the first place, and then to depend upon a happy issue of all their righteous counsels and administrations. It is, by the confession of all wise men, the best policy, and most conducive to the felicity of any Nation, for the Heads and Governors to lead their People in the ways of God's Laws, and the works of his Commandments. Which they will certainly do, if they seriously intend either their own, or their peoples welfare. For there can be no welfare without the love and favour of God; but he cannot favour those who walk contrary to his Laws. Which the people must do, if their leaders go before them in evil ways. For the leaders are the shepherds, and the people the flock; and the flock can go no other way, but as the shepherds direct them. Therefore it is the duty of every good shepherd so to watch over and order his flock, that

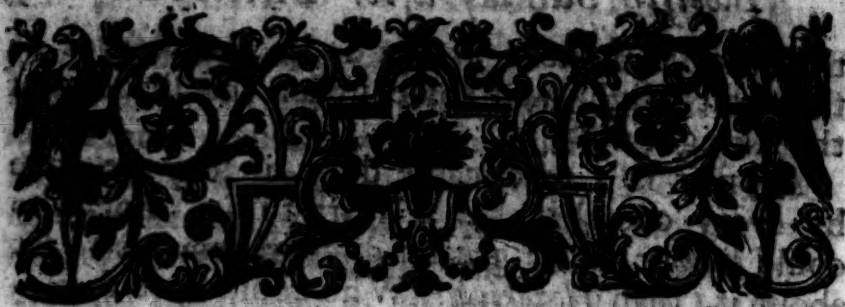
*Twelfth Sunday after TRINITY.* 83

that they may keep always under the defence of the most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

AND it is a practicable duty, it may be done by every one that has a heart to it. For who could labour under greater discouragements to set about it, than *Hezekiah*? Who could have so many groves to cut down, so many idols and their altars to demolish, as he found established by long prescription, under the reigns of almost all his predecessors? But herein he acted like a King indeed; not like a Servant of men, but a Minister of God; whose will he readily performed, as soon as he was invested with power and authority to do it. He presently appointed the ax to the groves, and the hammer and mattock to the idols and their altars, and obliged all his people, notwithstanding their ancient usage and customs, to come up at the feasts prescribed by God's Law, and worship at *Jerusalem*.

How sweet is a zeal for the Glory of God in the Spirit of Princes! How greatly does it add to their lustre and dignity! giving us the brightest idea of the divine Image, and making it almost lawful to cry out with the men of *Lystra*, *Acts xiv.* *The Gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.* May the Spirits of Princes be influenced and inspired with this zeal, until the Kingdoms of this World become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and his will be done upon Earth as it is in Heaven, that men may be found but little lower than the Angels here, and finally become subjects of the same immortal Kingdom, under his administration who is a greater than *Hezekiah*, or than *David* himself, even *Jesus Christ* our Lord, &c.





## SERMON XXXVIII.

*On the Thirteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*



2 KINGS xxiii. 25.

*And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses, neither after him arose there any like him.*



WE have here the character of Josiah King of Judah, summed up in few words, but they are very significant and much to his praise, for they give him the preference above all the Kings that went before him, or that came after him. To justify this preference, and make out the reasons of it, let us see the account of the life and actions of this King, as they are related here, and in the parallel Chapters of the second Book of *Chronicles*.

BUT first I must observe, that this King was prophesied of, and promised by name, above three hun-

*Thirteenth Sunday after TRINITY.* 85

hundred years before he was born; at the beginning of the reign of *Jeroboam* the First, who as he was sacrificing upon his new illegal altar in *Bethel*, a Prophet of *Judah* came suddenly upon him, and cried out against his altar in the word of the Lord, saying, *O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord, Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places, and mens bones shall be burnt upon thee,* 1 Kings xiii.

Now we don't find that any other of the Kings of *Judah* was ever called by this name; and we may safely affirm, that his father *Amon* would never give him this name in order to fulfil this prophecy, he being even worse than *Jeroboam* himself. So that we must ascribe it to the meer providence of God, that so good a man was born of so bad a father, and was called by the name which had been given him so many ages before; and this without any thought or design of his parents to fulfil the sacred Oracle. This is an undeniable argument of the truth of God's word, and that he interposes his omnipotent Power in controuling and ordering of human affairs.

AND was not *Josiah's* education as wonderful as his disposition, and the divine Favour and Assistance plainly with him at his first appearing upon the throne? For he was but eight years old when he began to reign, and how corrupt was his Court, how distracted the affairs of his Kingdom? His father *Amon*, a gross idolater, was murdered in his palace by his own servants, not upon the account of his idolatry, for in this the Conspirators differed not from him; but by the just Judgment of God, whose Law he had forsaken, and by whom he was abandoned to this outrage.

THIS however provoked the people to rise, and put the Conspirators to death. So that the young

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young King seemed like an infant exposed upon a troublesome sea. And yet so powerful was the grace of God in him, that in a few years he made it appear, that he was resolved to govern by the Law of God, and the example of the best of Kings. For thus we read 2 *Chron.* xxxiv. that in the eighth year of his reign, and sixteenth of his age, when first he took the reins of government into his own hands, he made publick profession of the true Religion, and chose the pattern of *David's* government for his imitation.

IN the twelfth year of his reign, and twentieth of his age, when he had reformed his own Court and Council, he began to purge *Jerusalem* and the whole Kingdom from the high places, and groves, and images, which abounded in them. And it is the more commendable in him, that he set about this regulation of sacred Things, without being warned or excited to it by any Prophet that we know of. For *Jeremiah*, who was afterwards an eminent Prophet in this reign, did not begin to prophecy till the next year, as we read *Jer.* i. 2.

*JOSIAH* went a progress, or visitation, as we may call it, thro' *Jerusalem* and *Judah*, for the very best of purposes, to demonstrate his zeal for the Glory of God, and to see with his own eyes, that the altars of Idols and their Images were demolished, and their groves cut down, and the bones of idolatrous Priests dug up and burnt.

AND he did the same in the Cities of *Manasseh*, and *Ephraim*, and *Simeon*, even unto *Naphthali*, i. e. he carried his reformation out of his own Kingdom of *Judah* into *Israel*; which shews that he had a jurisdiction among the ten Tribes; as likewise had several of his predecessors. For first of all it is said, 2 *Chron.* xv. that King *Asa* put away the abominable idols out of the Cities which he had taken from mount *Ephraim*: And that there



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joined in covenant with him abundance of people out of *Ephraim* and *Manasseh* and *Simeon*, when they saw that the Lord was with him. Whence we may conclude, that he gained some Cities by conquest from the King of *Israel*, and some others voluntarily put themselves under his Government. *zolly*, We read *2 Chron. xxx.* that *Hezekiah* summoned all *Israel* to come and keep the Passover at the house of the Lord in *Jerusalem*. And he dispatched posts to them with letters to this effect: Ye children of *Israel*, turn again to the Lord God of your fathers, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hands of the King of *Assyria*. And be not like your fathers and brethren, who, for trespassing against God, were given up to desolation, as ye see. Be not ye stiff-necked like them; but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into his Sanctuary which he has sanctified for ever; and serve him, that the fierceness of his wrath may be turned away from you. For if ye turn again to the Lord, your brethren and children shall find compassion before them that led them captive, so that they shall come again into this Land.

By these expressions it plainly appears, that *Hezekiah* summoned to the Passover at *Jerusalem* such *Israelites* as were left in their Cities by *Salmanasser* King of *Assyria*, when he carried away the ten Tribes into captivity; and that the *Assyrians* had not so conquered the Kingdom of *Israel*, but that the Kings of *Judah* had the same jurisdiction in certain Cities of the ten Tribes, as they had before in the days of *Asa*. And this right was continued to the days of *Josiah*, which was the reason of his carrying his reformation thither: Which when he had accomplished, he returned to *Jerusalem*.

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WHILE *Josiah* was employed in destroying the high places and monuments of Idolatry, he took care to promote a collection of money for cleansing and repairing the Temple of God, which had been long unfrequented, and gone to decay, by reason of the great prevalence of Idolatry; as it had happened in former times. For this purpose he sent *Levites* all over *Israel* and *Judah*, who collected the offerings of such as were disposed to contribute, which were very considerable; and when they had done, they paid the money into the hands of three general receivers, who carried it to *Hilkiab* the High-priest, and told it out before him, and then put it into the hands of the chief carpenters, masons, and other master workmen, imployed in the repairs of the Temple: Who were men of such strict piety and good conscience, (like those employed before on the like occasion, *2 Kings* xii. 15.) that there was no need to call them to account how they laid out the money.

As they were cleansing the Temple, in the eighteenth year of *Josiah's* reign, and twenty-sixth of his age, *Hilkiab* the Priest found the book of the law, i. e. a volume of the five Books of *Moses*, supposed to be the original Writing, which was, by the divine Command, to be laid up in the side of the Ark, but in a long disuse of the Temple Worship, was carelessly laid out of its proper place. This Book *Hilkiab* sent to the King by the hand of *Shaphan* the Scribe, after they had first read some passages of it together. The Scribe, as he was ordered, presented it to the King, and at the same time read in it, the same passages no doubt, as he had read but just before. At the hearing of which the King rent his cloaths; which makes it reasonable to suppose with the *Jewish* Doctors, that the passages now read, were the curses of God  
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denounced against the Nation, both King and People, in case they should forsake the Law, and fall off to Idolatry, as they had done very notoriously. These curses are to be found *Deut. xxviii.* and must needs sound very dreadful to a people who by their guilt, had rendered themselves obnoxious to them.

THIS seems to have been the first time that the King had ever heard any thing about them. Which must be imputed to the industry which the idolaters had used to suppress the copies of the Law, and put them out of the way. Just so the persecutors of the Christian Church made it penal for the Christians to keep their Bibles, and burnt and destroyed them where-ever they could find them.

BUT if *Josiah* and his Ministers were such strangers to the Book of the Law, how came the King to have such a religious Education, and how could he set about reforming Religion according to the will of God, before the Book was found? To this it may be answered, that the *Jews* were obliged to extract many passages out of the Law, and to write them upon the walls and doors of their houses. *zdzly*, Parents were enjoined to teach their children several things *memoriter* in their daily discourse and conversation; so that they might know much of their Law, without having a perfect Book of it. However, we cannot conclude from what we read here, that *Hilkiah* the Priest was a stranger to this Book, as it was copied out in those times; tho' he might not have seen this original of it before. But as to the Book in general, he seems to have been well acquainted with it; for I doubt not but he pointed out to *Shaphan* the denunciations of God's Judgments against Idolaters, and directed him to read them in the ears of the King: To whom indeed they were new, so that they





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as for their King, God was so pleased with the tenderness of his heart, and the deep concern he was struck with, when he heard the threatnings of the Law, that he would not bring the evil in his days, nor afflict his eyes with the sight of it; but that after his death the divine Wrath should be poured out upon the people.

This answer the Priest and his Associates reported to *Josiah*, who glorified God for the distinguishing love and regard vouchsafed him; and tho' he could not hope to remove the impending calamities, yet resolving to do the best he was able for his time; he called a general assembly of the Princes and People together in *Jerusalem*, and went up into the Temple; and caused the Judgments of God to be read distinctly and audibly before them all. By which having duly affected them with the imminent dangers into which their idolatries had thrown them, he stood up; and proposed that all there present should enter into an engagement of stricter obedience to the Law of God; which he begun in his own person, to this effect; 'That he would walk after the Lord, and keep his Commandments, Testimonies, and Statutes, with all his heart and soul, and perform the words of the Covenant written in that Book.' Which done, he caused all the assembly, every one for himself, to enter into the same engagement; and ratify the same Covenant, that they would put away the abominations of their forefathers, and faithfully adhere to the Service of the Lord their God. And happy had it been for them; if they had been as sincere in this profession as their King; to whose example tho' they outwardly conformed during his reign, yet even then they continued to be secret idolaters, as the Prophet *Jeremiah* complains of them, who says that 'from the thirteenth year of *Josiah's* reign, to the fourth of his son,

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he had been calling upon the inhabitants of *Jerusalem* and the men of *Judah* to fear the Lord; but that they were treacherous people, and turned not to him unfeignedly, with all their heart, sacrificing to the Host of Heaven upon the tops of their houses, and keeping the images of strange Gods in their secret chambers.

AND yet the good King used incredible diligence to root them out. *Josephus* says, that he ransacked not only every city, but every village and house to discover concealed idols. The sacred History assures us, that he commanded the officers of the Temple to search and bring out of it all the vessels consecrated to idols, which he burnt without *Jerusalem*, and carried their ashes to *Betbel*. For thither he went, after he had purged *Jerusalem* from idols, and slain the Priests of *Baal* and of the groves, and defiled the valley of the son of *Hinnom*, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass thro' the fire to *Molech*: After he had taken away the horses which the Kings of *Judah* had devoted to the Sun, in imitation of the *Persians*, and broke down the strange altars which they had erected in the courts of the Lord's house, and destroyed the high places which *Solomon* had built for *Ashoreth* and other idols: (What legions of the powers of darkness were here!) I say, when King *Josiah* had done all these things, he went to *Betbel*. For this was the place where he was to fulfil the famous prophecy which I mentioned before. Accordingly as soon as he came thither, he broke down the altar which *Jeroboam* had made, and burnt his high place, and his grove, and golden calf, and stamped them small to powder. But first he opened the sepulchres of the idolatrous Priests, and took out their bones, and burnt them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the threatening which God sent to *Jeroboam*, 1 Kings xiii. But



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But he would not suffer any that were about him to disturb the bones of the Prophet who had foretold these things, nor those of the old Prophet of *Samaria*, who was buried in the same grave, and consequently escaped by the same indulgence.

AND all the houses of the high places, that were in the Cities of *Samaria*, which the Kings of *Israel* had made, but were now fallen under the dominion of the Kings of *Judah*, did *Josiah* take away, and did to them according to all that he had done in *Berbel*. For he slew their Priests, and burnt them upon their own altars, together with the bones of other men, that he might utterly defile them; and then returned to *Jerusalem*.

HAVING thus shewn his abhorrence of idols, he now turns his thoughts to do some eminent act of honour and worship to the God of *Israel*; and the feast of the Passover being at hand, the King published an edict, commanding that it should be kept exactly according to the Law of *Moses*, and the regulations which King *David* and *Solomon* had made in their reigns, who had taken care to appoint the Priests and *Levites* to attend upon the Service of God in orderly courses. For their numbers being encreased far beyond what they were in the days of *Moses*, *David* disposed them into convenient divisions and companies, so that all confusion was avoided. He also assigned them new employments, to sing the *Psalms* of his own and others composing, and to play upon variety of musical instruments, whereby he made the divine Service most beautiful and cheerful. All these orders King *Josiah* caused to be punctually observed, so that the performance of the Temple-service was truly glorious. And that the people who were assembled from all parts in very great multitudes, might have a plentiful feast, the King gave thirty thousand Lambs and Kids, and three thousand Bulls,

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locks, and the Princes of the Priests and Levites, and other rich men, gave seven thousand six hundred of the smaller, and eight hundred of the larger sort of cattle. All which were offered and divided to the people in such excellent order, and the whole solemnity was begun and ended with so much decency, that the like was never heard of at any Passover, from the beginning of their Kingly Government to this time.

THUS wonderfully did *Josiah* signalize his zeal for the Glory of God, in repairing the Temple, in purging *Judah* and *Israel* from Idolatry, in restoring the Assemblies and solemn Rites of God's Worship; and all this in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he was but twenty-six years of age.

MOREOVER the workers with familiar Spirits, and the Wizards, and all the abominations which were known in *Jerusalem* and *Judah*, did *Josiah* put away, in obedience to those words of the Law, which he had heard out of the Book which *Hilkiah* the Priest found in the house of the Lord.

AND now in admiration of the many and worthy deeds which this Prince had done in so few years of life, the sacred Historian sums up his character in the words of my Text, that of all the kings that went before him, or that came after him, there was none like him.

WHAT then? Shall we prefer him before *David* and *Hezekiah*, who were incomparably the best Kings of all that went before him? *Procopius Gazæus* thinks that no such preference is intended, but that he excelled *Asa*, *Jehoshaphat* and *Jotham*, who tho' they are said to have governed well, yet came far behind *Josiah* in their zeal and piety. And indeed, when it is said at the beginning of this King's reign, that he walked in all the ways of *David* his father, from which he turned not aside

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aside to the right hand or to the left, the same writer can hardly be thought to prefer him before *David* in the words of my Text. However, a diligent observer will find, that there were some blemishes even in *David* and *Hezekiah*, whereas we read of none in the life of *Josiah*. And if we consider how horribly his people were corrupted, both in their Religion and Morals, when he came to the throne; how the usurping Idols had filled the very Temple of God, and the holy City, with their images and altars, and how Princes, Priests, and all orders of men were become their votaries; if we compute the difficulties which this Prince had to struggle with, and how soon he surmounted them all, and had finished the reformation of *Israel* and *Judah*, at an age when other Kings usually begun to reign, we may very justly, and without lessening the character of others, call *Josiah* an incomparable King.

AFTER *Josiah* had thus restored the worship of God, he lived, says *Josephus*, in peace, riches, honour and esteem with all men for the space of thirteen years, as appears by what follows in that Author. And we may conclude from 2 *Kings* xxii. 1. that he died in the thirty-ninth year of his age; for he was eight years old when he began to reign, and reigned thirty-one years. Thirteen of which he lived in the enjoyment of the good things which he had done for his Kingdom. His death happened on this manner.

THE King of *Egypt*, affecting the Empire of all *Asia*, led a great army towards *Carchemish*, or *Carcusium*, a City upon the river *Euphrates*, where he expected to fight with the *Medes* and *Babylonians*. Now when he drew near to the City of *Mende*, called in Scripture *Megiddo*, (which was subject to *Josiah*, as *Josephus* affirms) King *Josiah* denied him passage, and would not suffer his army to



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to march thro' his Country, either fearing that they would ravage and spoil it, or else because he had an alliance with *Pharaoh's* enemies. The *Egyptian* assured him by a herald, that he had no mind to molest the King of *Judah*, and warned him to take heed how he opposed him; for, said he, *I make this expedition by the divine command; therefore if you withstand me, you will be destroyed by God, who is with me.* But *Josiah* thought that this speech, in the mouth of an *Infidel*, deserved no regard; and so proceeded to fight with him in a disguise, and came to an engagement in the valley of *Megiddo*; where he was shot by the *Egyptian* Archers, and returning to *Jerusalem*, quickly died of his wounds, and was buried with great magnificence in the sepulcher of the Kings of *Judah*.

THUS was fulfilled the prophecy of *Huldah*, who foretold that the Judgments which were threatned in the Book of the Law, were ready to be poured out upon that generation; but that God, in compassion to *Josiah* for his great piety, would first take him out of the world, that his eyes might not see the afflictions; and that he should be gathered to his fathers in peace. And so it came to pass: For tho' he fell by the arms of the *Egyptians*, yet was it in a war which was not designed against him nor his people; whom he left in a peaceable condition to solemnize his funeral, and to place his son on the throne of his father.

GREAT mourning was made for the death of *Josiah*, greater than ever was made for any other of their Kings that we read of. *Jeremiah* lamented him; and all the singing-men, and singing-women, in their mournful elegies, commemorated his loss, as the greatest calamity that had ever befallen them. And they made it an Ordinance in *Israel*, that they should never forget this fatal stroke;

stroke; as they had reason: for after this they never saw good day. *Josephus* roundly asserts, that the Lamentations of *Jeremiah* which are now extant in our Bibles, were composed upon this occasion: But it is manifest to every one who reads that Book, that it was written after the destruction of *Jerusalem* by the *Babylonians*, which is the main subject of it. I confess I could gladly apply to *Josiah* that passage, iv. 20. which says, *The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord was taken in their pits: of whom we said, under his shadow we shall live among the Heathen.* And to him the ancient Rabbins applied it; tho' modern Commentators think it suits best with the circumstances of *Zedekiah*: But allowing it proper to style him *their breath*, and *the Lord's anointed*; yet I cannot see how *Jeremiah* could conceive hopes of safety under his shadow or protection, whom he characterizes in his prophecy, as a very bad Governor. Whereas it is certain that both Princes and People did promise themselves this safety under *Josiah's* excellent administration. And if it be hard to understand how *Josiah* was taken in the pits or net of the *Babylonians*, this difficulty, I think, is cleared by saying, that his being unhappily entangled in alliance with the *Babylonians*, exposed him to fall by the arms of the *Egyptians*. After all, I agree with those who say, that *Jeremiah's* elegy which he writ expressly upon the death of *Josiah*, is lost: But since it was usual for a long time to make some mention of him in all elegies, I think we may fairly interpret this passage to be meant of him.

To conclude: We may justly compare the sin of Idolatry among the *Jews*, to a fretting incurable leprosy; with which the very walls of their houses were sometimes infected; and which obliged them to break down the whole building, and cast away the stones and timber of it into some

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unclean place without the city, as we read *Levit. xiv. 45*. Just so they were infected with this spiritual leprosy, this sin of Idolatry, which stuck to them, and spread all over them, till it caused them to be cast out of their habitations, and laid their Temple and Cities in the dust. Frequent endeavours had been used to cure it, by *Aha*, by *Hazakiah*, by *Josiah*, which put some stop to it for their time, but as soon as they were gone, how quickly and powerfully did it return again! When we observe, in the accounts of *Josiah's* reformation, how prodigious rank Idolatry was grown, not only in the extreme parts of his Dominions, but even in the Metropolis and Temple it self, we might be tempted to think that it had held quiet possession ever since *Solomon's* time, for even *Solomon's* groves are mentioned as now standing; did we not know that not an age before, and in the memory of several men now living, *Hazekiah* reformed in much the same method, by cleansing the Temple, breaking images, demolishing high places, cutting down groves. How then came all these things to want a reforming hand so quickly again? Even because a zeal for pure Religion died with this good King, and his successor presently replanted that Idolatry which he had destroyed, and defiled that holy Temple which he had cleansed. And the same thing happened to *Josiah's* reformation. As soon as he was laid in his grave, his son and successor revived the idolatrous practices of the worst of his predecessors.

WHAT stability in good ways can be expected from the inconstancy of human administrations, and the variety of spirits, of which the greater part are of the worst sort? However, the tragical end of the *Jewish* Church and State, should warn all Christians that are in authority, what an impolitic part they act, while they suffer such sins to grow



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grow up in their Government, as they shall never be able to root out with the most diligent hands, but shall be infected with them till they are destroyed by them.

THERE are other sins, beside gross Idolatry, which by long use and custom have so established themselves in the practice of the people, that the best Teachers and Governors have not been able to extirpate them, so as to save their people from those judgments which they have seen coming upon them. Witness the posterity of these very *Jews*, who were restored from *Babylon* to their fathers inheritances, and constantly abstained from the worship of Idols, and yet were so hardened at last in other kind of sins, that they brought themselves into another captivity, in which they remain to this very day; notwithstanding the voice of their great Prophet, who ceased not to admonish them of their sins, and call them to repentance, and foreshewed them the calamities which they had provoked God to prepare for them. This Prophet was our Lord *Jesus Christ*; whose voice may we dutifully hear and follow, that so we may escape the punishment of the disobedient. To him, &c.





# SERMON XXXIX.

*On the Fourteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*



JEREM. xxii. 3.

*Thus saith the Lord, Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.*



THESE words are part of a message which God sent by the Prophet *Jeremiab*, to the royal family of *Judab*, the sinful posterity of that great and worthy King *Josiab*, who reigned after him, with whom this Prophet was personally acquainted; for he began to prophecy in the thirteenth year of *Josiab*, and continued so to do till *Jerusalem* was destroyed, and *Zedekiah* the last King was carried away captive to *Babylon*.

KING *Josiab* had four sons, who are thus named 1 *Chron.* iii. 15. the first-born *Johanan*, the second *Joakim*, the third *Zedekiah*, the fourth *Shallum*; the first of these died, as is justly supposed, before

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before his father; all the rest sat successively upon the throne of *Judah*, and as such *Jeremiah* mentions them in this and the foregoing Chapter.

FIRST he tells us, ch. xxi. how *Zedekiah* sent to him, desiring him to enquire of the Lord concerning the event of the war, which *Nebuchadnezzar* King of *Babylon* was carrying on against *Jerusalem* and *Judah*; and to intercede with God, that he would so order things, that the *Chaldeans* should withdraw their forces from them. This you see was in the last extremity of the *Jews*, under their last King. But now here in the xxii chap. the Prophet changes the scene and the time of his prophecy, and comes back from *Zedekiah*, to the three foregoing Kings, all which he mentions in this Chapter. First he says that *Shallum* the son of *Josiah* reigned in his father's stead. Now we read in the History of the Kings, that upon the death of *Josiah*, the people anointed his son *Jeboabaz*, and made him King in his father's stead. This is the same with *Shallum* here; for they had all two names: In the *Chronicles* he is reckoned last, as the youngest of *Josiah's* sons: But that could not be; *Zedekiah* was certainly the youngest. They might, for some reason, be placed out of the order of their birth, as were the three sons of *Noah*, and some others in the *Jewish* genealogies.

BUT neither was this *Jeboabaz*, or *Shallum*, the eldest of *Josiah's* sons. For he was but twenty-three years old when he began to reign, and reigned but three months. For the King of *Egypt*, returning in that time from *Carchusium*, whither he went at the end of *Josiah's* reign, imagining that this *Shallum* would prove his enemy, and resolving to oblige another, he deposed him, and made his brother *Eliakim*, whom he named *Jehoiakim*, King in his stead; who being at that



time twenty-five years of age, it is plain that he was the elder brother.

**JEHOIAKIM** reigned eleven years, thus: The first four years he was tributary to his patron the King of Egypt. But then *Nebuchadnezzar* brought an army into Syria, and drove away the Egyptians, who had over-run it, as far as *Pelusium*. But he did not meddle with *Jeboiakim*, (as *Josephus* thinks) till four years after; when he led his army against *Jerusalem*, and demanded tribute of the Jews. *Jeboiakim*, not being able to withstand him, submitted, and paid tribute for three years. At the end of which (understanding that the Egyptians were up in arms against the Babylonians) he refused to make any farther payment, depending upon the Egyptians that they would release him: But he was disappointed of his hopes; for *Nebuchadnezzar* proving victorious, quickly sent to *Jerusalem*, and took some of the sacred Vessels of the Temple, and three thousand of the chief men of *Jerusalem*, and carried them away to *Babylon*.

AFTER his decease, his son *Jeboiachin* was set upon the Throne, at eighteen years of age; but whether by his own people, or by *Nebuchadnezzar*, is uncertain. This King is called *Jeconiah*, 2 Chron. iii. 16. and *Coniah* by our Prophet in this Chapter, by way of contempt; as some think. For such abbreviations of names among us, are reckoned too familiar to consist with the dignity of great persons. When he had reigned three months and ten days, *Nebuchadnezzar*, suspecting perhaps that he would take part with the Egyptians against him, sent his servants against *Jerusalem*, and besieged it; and after some time he came thither in person. Upon his summons, *Jeboiachin* went out to him with his Mother, Servants, Princes and Officers, and surrendered up the City into his hands. What followed upon this surrender, showed that *Nebuchadnezzar*

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*Nebuchadnezzar* was absolute Master of the lives and fortunes of King and People: For he carried away almost all the treasures of the Temple and the Royal Palace, and took captive the Royal Family, the Princes, and mighty men of valour, the artificers and smiths, and all the men that were strong and fit for war, leaving few besides the inferior sort of people, over whom he made *Zedekiah* King, as we read at large 2 *Kings* xxiv.

**JOSEPHUS** his account of this captivity is somewhat different. He says that when *Nebuchadnezzar* had sent his Captains to besiege *Jerusalem*, King *Jochin*, considering that it was for his sake that this distress was come upon them, took his wife and nearest relations, and voluntarily delivered them up as hostages and pledges of his fealty, into the hands of *Nebuchadnezzar's* Captains, receiving at the same time an oath from them, that neither his Family nor City should be injured by them. But this promise, says he, continued not a year; for *Nebuchadnezzar* observed it not, but commanded his Captains to imprison all the young men and artificers that were in the City, and to bring them bound unto *Babylon*: And that the number of them was ten thousand eight hundred thirty and two persons, beside the King, his mother, and near relations.

**JEHOIACHIN** being thus removed, *Nebuchadnezzar* made his uncle *Zedekiah*, who was the youngest son of *Josiah*, King in his stead. He was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in *Jerusalem*; during which time he contemned the Laws, and perverted the Ordinances of God, as *Josephus* expresses it; who adds, that he kept young men about him who were meer Atheists, and that all the people under his dominion committed outrages, and did whatever seemed good in their own eyes. And to

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fill up the measure of their iniquities, their King violated his oath which he had taken to *Nebuchadnezzar*, and rebelled against him. For when the *Babylonian* advanced *Zedekiah* to the Throne, he caused him to swear that he would be a friend to the *Chaldeans*, and never enter into any alliance with their enemies the *Egyptians*. But he shewed himself a perfidious man, and acted a contrary part, which so provoked the *Babylonian*, that he came and destroyed him and his people without mercy, and burnt the City and Temple down to the ground, and carried the remainder of the people, and their precious things, into captivity.

FROM this account which I have given of the family of *Josiah*, it appears, that after him four Kings reigned to the end of the Kingdom of *Judah*, of which three were his sons, and one was his grandson; that the first and third reigned but three months apiece, and the second and fourth eleven years apiece; so that all the time of their four reigns put together, made but twenty-two years and a half; and all their lives were troublesome, and their deaths tragical; the three last were carried away by the King of *Babylon*, each in his turn, with so many people, and so much treasure every time, that it has puzzled learned men in which reign to begin the account of the seventy years captivity. And it is justly their wonder, to consider, that the last remains of these people should not repent and turn to God, after they had seen, as they needs must, in so short a time, so many of their relations and acquaintance carried into a state of slavery, in an Enemy's country. But so incorrigible were they, that *Ezekiel* complains, that even in this state (in which he saw them, for he was an exile with them) they persisted in their impieties, and were not at all amended. His whole prophecy is full of complaints of their incurable hard-



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hardness. And in his xiii chap. he tells us, that they still entertained false Prophets (unto whom they hearkened rather than to *Ezekiel*) who saw visions of peace for *Jerusalem*, when there was no peace; i. e. they made the people believe that *Jerusalem* should not be taken by the *Chaldeans*, but that they should all be restored to it again in a little time.

No more regard did they pay to the denunciations of *Jeremiah*, tho' he promised them by a special commission in the name of the Lord, that if they would perform the injunctions of my Text, the royal family of *David* should still continue to reign, and the palace and throne be supported with the usual attendance and magnificence. But that the Lord had sworn, that if they would not hearken to the words of my Text, *their royal house should become a desolation*.

AND what were these injunctions? Why, that the King (whether *Shallum*, *Jeboiakim*, or *Jeconiah*, no matter which; the Prophet knew them all) that the King, I say, should see that justice and judgment were executed, that the spoiled should be delivered out of the hand of the oppressor, that the stranger, the fatherless and widow should be protected from injuries, and due care be taken to prevent the shedding of innocent blood.

IN laying which charge upon the King, methinks I hear the Prophet speak to this effect: ' Sir, if you do not take care of these things, your Government is nothing. For you are the fountain of Justice and Judgment, which subordinate Magistrates will certainly pervert, if you don't shew your self a zealous lover of them, and a terrible avenger of all their neglects. The weaker sort of your people, especially the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, are liable to a thousand injuries from the pride or avarice of the

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\* the rich and mighty! And who can defend them  
\* from these sons of violence but you, who by your  
\* station are raised so high, as to be above the fear  
\* or favour of all mankind, and have nothing to  
\* withhold your hand from administering impartial  
\* justice; but can securely crush every oppressor,  
\* and let the fierce and insolent know, that if he  
\* sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be  
\* shed.

But is it not better that Kings should be discharged from such low thoughts, as the care of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow? Is it not more princely and royal to be the Commander of mighty armies, the Founder of stately palaces, to be surrounded with Guards, and attended with Nobles, to amass mighty treasures, and contract great alliances, and enjoy all sorts of pleasures and delights without restraint? Durst our Prophet himself have controuled such a spirit as this in the house of Judah? If we seek forward into this Chapter, we shall find him reproving it in *Jehoiakim*, the second of the three Kings whom he mentions here, and to whom he was sent with the injunctions of my Text. *Shalt thou reign, says he, or shalt thou establish thy throne and prolong thy days in greater security, because thou encloseth thyself in cedar, building a large house, spacious chambers, and cieling them with cedar, and painting them with vermillion? Did not thy father eat and drink, contenting himself with moderate, necessary things, and do judgment and justice? and then it was well with him: He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the Lord.*

By *Jehoiakim's* father, he either means his immediate father *Josiah*, who made it his business to glorify God, and do good to his people; or his more remote father King *David*, whose *Psalms* abun-

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abundantly testify, how much he had it at heart to do the same, and how bitterly he repented it, whenever, by any omission or commission, he transgressed such duties of his station as are mentioned in the words of my Text.

As for *David's* regard to the Law of God in general, let *Psalme cxi.* witness how heartily he prayed to be instructed in it. As a King he resolves *Psalme ci.* to govern, first himself and then his Court and Kingdom, with so much justice, that good men might expect all favour from him, but no wicked man of any sort have the least countenance or encouragement. *I will,* says he, *behave my self wisely in a perfect way; I will walk in my house with a perfect heart,* sincerely endeavouring to make my self a pattern of all piety and virtue to my Court. *I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the sins of unfaithfulness; no such thing shall cleave unto me.* No pretended reasons of state shall tempt me to project any thing against the Law, to which I will ever confine my self: For I abhor the practices of those, who forsake that rule to pursue their own private interests and inclinations: No such corrupt principles shall ever find a place in my mind. *A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person:* I will turn him instantly out of my service, who shall dare to suggest to me any unrighteous counsels: I will have no familiarity with him, much less make him my favourite, who makes no conscience how he compasses his ends. *Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath a high look and a proud heart, I will not suffer:* I will be so far from listening to their private whispers, who by secret calumnies and detractions endeavour to supplant the righteous, that I will severely punish them. Nor will I endure those, whose pride

makes



' makes them overlook all others, as if they were  
 ' another species of creatures ; or whose unsati-  
 ' able covetousness and ambition, makes them stu-  
 ' dy their own advancement more than the pub-  
 ' lick good. *Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of*  
 ' *the land, that they may dwell with me : he that*  
 ' *walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me : I will*  
 ' look out for faithful persons, men fearing God,  
 ' and of clear integrity ; and in what part of the  
 ' Land soever I find them, I will make them of  
 ' my privy-council ; and no man shall bear any  
 ' office under me, but he that behaves himself  
 ' unblameably in it. *He that worketh deceit, shall*  
 ' *not dwell within my house : he that telleth lies, shall*  
 ' *not tarry in my sight :* No subtil knave, that is  
 ' made up of fraud and artifice, or that devises  
 ' ways and means to oppress my subjects, shall  
 ' remain in my service : Tho' he have craftily got  
 ' into it under a guise of simplicity ; yet no false  
 ' informer, flatterer, or any sort of liar, shall con-  
 ' tinue in my favour. *I will early destroy all the*  
 ' *wicked out of the land ; that I may cut off evil-doers*  
 ' *from the city of the Lord :* As soon as ever I dis-  
 ' cover iniquity, I will use my utmost diligence  
 ' to correct it ; especially in the place of my pe-  
 ' culiar residence, which ought to be an example  
 ' to the rest of my Kingdom : Taking care of the  
 ' courts of Justice, that they punish offenders ac-  
 ' cording to their demerits ; and that they cut off  
 ' those evil members, who have got an incurable  
 ' habit of doing wickedly.

SUCH were the vows and resolutions which  
*David* made for the rules of his Kingly Govern-  
 ment, very worthy of the man after God's own  
 heart, whom he had raised from the sheepfold to  
 be the Ruler of his people ; and he put them to-  
 gether and recorded them in *Psalms* ci. that it  
 might be a memorial to himself of what he had  
 vowed

vowed to do; and to his people, of what they might expect from him; and to his sons and successors, and all other Kings who should read them, to assist them and put them in mind of the duties of their station.

AND yet this great Prince could not think this excellent model of Government sufficient: But in his last days, when he appointed his son *Solomon* to ascend his throne, he composed the *lxxii Psalm* for his use: 'Wherein he beseeches God to endue him with such a sound judgment and such an honest heart, that he might always govern his people according to the divine Laws, and administer his affairs with such impartial justice and clemency, that his poorest subjects might be maintained in their rights, or recover them, when lost, from powerful oppressors. He prays that his son might have grace to consider the cause of the meanest of the people, to save the children of the needy, and to break in pieces their oppressors. That he might come down like rain upon the grass; or as the showers that water the Earth: Graciously condescending to people of low degree, and treating them in so gentle a manner, as might make his authority no less acceptable, than showers of rain in the heat of summer are to the thirsty parched fields. That in his days the righteous might flourish; that he might be the saviour of him that had no helper; that he might rescue friendless innocents from falsehood and violence, and be very sparing of their blood, and as tender of their lives, as of those of his greatest subjects.'

So prays King *David* for his son *Solomon*, for such a spirit of Government in him, as he assures him would be the foundation of all his happiness. And here I might finish this kind of citations, but that I cannot, in honour to the other sex, omit the

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the advice of King Lemuel's mother; who, whatever she were (for that is not agreed amongst Interpreters) was so wise a woman, that her discourse has obtained a place with the works of King Solomon, and makes the last Chapter of the *Proverbs*. In this advice she recommends several qualifications of a good Governor, which were so necessary to make him happy and useful in his Government, that there was no doing without them. I shall mention three of them.

The *First* is, to subdue that carnal lust, which she knew to be very violent in youth, especially in young Princes; who have more provocations, and are apt to be more licentious than other men: But fail not by such lewdness to bring such mischiefs upon themselves and their Kingdoms, as are not to be repaired, and often end in their destruction.

*Secondly*, She admonishes him to avoid the intemperate use of wine, and to keep himself always cool and sober, that he might be able to give a right judgment upon causes when they were brought before him. *It is not, says she, for kings to drink wine, nor princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.*

*Thirdly*, She charges him to administer Justice exactly to all his subjects, and not merely to commit the care of it to others, but sometimes to sit in person upon the Tribunal: And if he saw a man in danger to lose his right, because he was not able to make it out thro' fear, ignorance, or want of elocution; then she bids the King her son to assist him in his defence, and make it out for him, as soon as he perceives that the cause is good, and only suffers by wrong management, *Open thy mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as are appointed for destruction.* And when he had cleared up the righteousness of the cause, presently to bring it to



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a speedy issue, and to make an end of it by a just sentence, that the honest man might have the benefit of it, and not be oppressed and impoverished by tedious delays.

FROM what has been said, we must conclude, that it was very fit for God to send to the Kings of Judah such a message as is contained in the words of my Text, *That they should execute judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor; and do no wrong nor violence to the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow, nor defile the land with the shedding of innocent blood.* For it appears from the Law of God, and the maxims of Government laid down by the best of men, that these things are so properly the care of Princes, that they are but an empty name without it. *Thy father,* said Jeremiah to Jehoiakim, *did judgment and justice.* He might have quoted to him the example of his ancestor King Jehoshaphat, *1 Chron. xix.* who not only appointed Judges in all the Cities of Judah, but gave them a solemn charge with his own mouth to take heed what they did. *For,* says he, *ye judge not for man, ye are much more answerable to God, who is present with you, and hears your judgments. Wherefore let his fear be upon you, take heed and act as in his presence: remembering that you represent him who cannot commit iniquity, nor respect persons, nor take bribes.* Moreover, when he returned to Jerusalem, he constituted there a supreme Court, which should receive appeals from their brethren of the inferior Cities, in matters which were too hard for them. And he charged them, saying, *What cause soever shall come before you, distrust it faithfully, and with a perfect heart, as men who have the fear of God before their eyes. In doing of which you will please God, and prevent his wrath from falling upon you and your brethren:*

**THUS**

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THUS might *Jeremiah* have derived an authority to his injunctions from the practice of this, and all other good Kings; and even from the example of the King of Kings, who glories in the style of the God of Judgment and Justice; the Father of the fatherless, the Husband of the widow, who helpeth them to right that suffer wrong, who feedeth the hungry: who constantly makes inquisition for innocent blood; and when he makes it, he neglects not the cry of that of the poorest creature. He standeth in the congregation of Princes, says *Asaph*; he is the supreme of all Judges. He calls them to the Laws of truth, saying, 'How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the rich and powerful? Why do not ye defend the poor and fatherless, and do justice to the afflicted and needy? Deliver the poor and helpless, rescue them out of the hands of wicked men.'

Now since he that dwelleth in the highest Heavens, humbles himself to regard the meanest of the children of men, let not the highest upon Earth reckon it too low and lessening a condescension to do the same. Why, such gracious regards and protections God has made the indispensable conditions of his Blessings, the stability of Thrones, the exaltation of Kingdoms, the walls and bulwarks about them, to defend them from foreign invasions. And tho' he was highly offended with these Kings of *Judah* here mentioned, and upon the point of sending them into captivity, as he quickly did; yet he so delights in those who exercise loving-kindness and judgment and righteousness in the Earth, that he stands to treat with them upon this foot, promising to continue them and their posterity in the possession of their Kingdom, if they would but obey these injunctions.

SOME

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SOME such overture was made to *Israel* upon the same condition, by the Prophet *Amos*, v. 'Hearken, says he, ye that turn judgment into 'wormwood, and leave off to exercise righteousness in the earth. Seek unto him who strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong; and be 'not of the number of those who hate him that 'rebuketh in the gate, and abhor him that speaketh uprightly. Forasmuch as you trample upon the poor, and take away his bread by violence; ye have built houses of hewen stone, but 'shall not dwell in them: Ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but shall not drink wine of them. 'You afflict the just, and take bribes, and turn 'aside the poor in the gate from their right. 'Now therefore change your ways; seek good, 'and not evil, that ye may live; and so the Lord, 'the God of Hosts shall be with you. Hate the 'evil, and love the good, and establish judgment 'in the gate: It may be that the Lord God of 'Hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of *Joseph*.'

THE same expedient did *Daniel* recommend to *Nebuchadnezzar* for the averting of God's anger, chap. iv. when he had explained to him his ominous dream, and told him it was the decree of the most High to drive him from among men, and cause him to eat grass with the beasts of the field; *Wherefore*, said he, *O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.*

How beautiful is the righteousness recommended in my Text, that when put on it can hide such a multitude of sins as were in *Israel*, in *Judah*, in the palace of *Babylon*! Let us beseech God to distinguish us with this most amiable feature of his own divine Majesty, that abounding in this righteousness

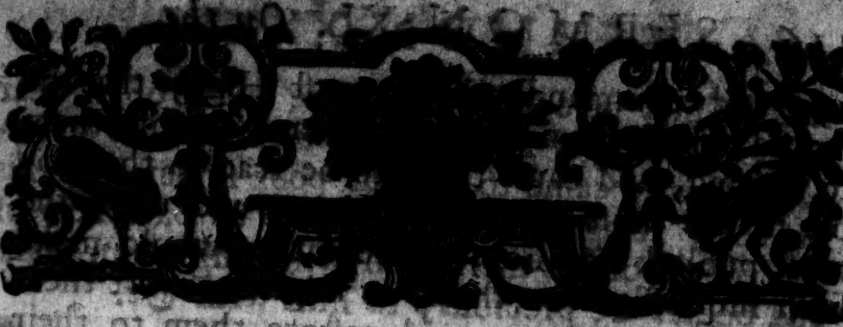


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hills we may be conformed to the image of his dear Son; that King of Israel who hath fulfilled all right-  
 eousness, who came to call us poor sinners into his  
 Heavenly Kingdom, and to make us partakers of  
 the riches of his mercy, in whose sight our souls  
 and bodies are precious; to him with &c.

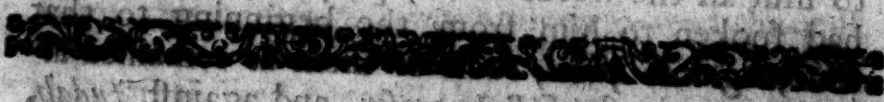


SER-



# S E R M O N XL.

*On the Fifteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*



JER. xxxv. 32.

*Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah, all the words of the Book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burnt in the fire; and there were added besides unto them many like words.*

**T**H E Prophet *Jeremiah* had preached many Sermons to the house of *Judah*, but to no manner of purpose; he was not a right court chaplain, I mean in the eye of the world, and according to the fashions and manners of men: But in deed and reality he was the very best they had, being of God's own appointing, on purpose to have saved them from destruction, if they would but have hearkened to him. Now since the discourses and warnings which he had spoken to them from the mouth of God were nothing regarded, it was the pleasure

sure and command of the most High, that he should collect them all together, and commit them to writing, and cause them to be read to the people in the most frequented place, and upon the most publick occasion, to see if they would make such impressions on them, as might convert them from their evil ways, and restore them to their obedience of God's Law, and so prevent that captivity which was ready to swallow them up as the punishment of their sins.

ACCORDINGLY the Prophet called *Baruch*, whom he imployed to write for him, and dictated to him all the words of the prophecy which God had spoken to him from the beginning to that time, against *Israel*, such of them as remained after the conquest of *Salmaneser*, and against *Judah*, and against all the Nations round about. All this *Baruch* wrote from the mouth of *Jeremiah* upon a roll of parchment, which was the fashion of the Books of those times.

WHEN this was done, the Prophet told the Scribe, that this writing must be read in the house of the Lord. 'For my own part, says he, I am under such circumstances as hinder me from going thither.' If any should desire to know what it was which withheld the Prophet from going, it is not easy to assign the reason. At first view it looks as if he were a state prisoner; and so he was afterwards under *Zedekiah*; but some following passages of this Chapter will hardly allow us to conclude that he was imprisoned at this time under *Jehoiakim*. For first, it is said, ver. 19. that when the Princes of *Judah* had heard the words of the prophecy, and undertook to report them to the King, they kindly cautioned *Baruch*, saying, Go you and *Jeremiah* and hide your selves, and let no man know where ye be. And when the King had heard them, and in great displeasure command-  
ed



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ed his officers to arrest the Prophet and his Scribe, it is said that *the Lord bid them*. But now if *Jeremiah* had been a state-prisoner at this time, there had been no need of giving orders to look out for him and take him up. So that we cannot think he was under this sort of confinement, but restrained from going abroad, either by some bodily infirmity or legal impediment, which to us must remain a secret.

*BARUCH* therefore at *Jeremiah's* request, went up to the Temple on a fast-day, which 'tis probable was kept for imploring the divine Mercy and Assistance against the arms of the *Chaldeans*. Upon this occasion it was proper to read the roll, because the assembly of worshippers was greater than usual, and because the present distress would dispose their hearts to take deeper impressions from what they should hear of the divine Warnings. But whether this prophecy was read only at one, or at two several fasts, is somewhat doubtful: And the doubt arises from the two different times here mentioned. For first, God commanded the Prophet to do this in the fourth year of *Jehoiakim's*; and he seems to have gone presently about it. Again, ver. 9. it is said that it was read in the fifth year of *Jehoiakim* and ninth month; which has inclined some Interpreters to think, that there were two publick readings of this roll. But we will let this pass, and come to that which is certain. *Baruch* was directed to read it in the Temple, and the place in the Temple where he stood to read, was the chamber of *Gemariah* the son of *Shaphan* the Scribe, who favoured him with a standing at the door or window of his chamber, which looking out into the courts of the Temple, and being raised above them, was a very commodious situation, from whence he might be heard by the large congregation of people who were gathered thereabout.

WHEN he had done reading the roll, *Micaiab* the son of *Gemariah*, who stood by, and heard every thing, went away directly to the King's palace, to the Scribe's chamber, or Secretary's office there, and declared amongst several of the nobility there present, what he had heard at the Temple. Whereupon they sent one of their officers to call *Baruch*, and bid him bring his roll with him. Forthwith he came along with the messenger, and at their request read over the prophecy to them. When they had heard the calamities of war and captivity which were threatned in it, as ready to fall upon them, they were very much affrighted, and told *Baruch* they would acquaint the King with the contents of his writing, to know his opinion about it, and how far he was disposed to follow the directions of it: And till that was known, they advised *Baruch* and the Prophet to keep out of the way, lest the King should be offended at them, and seek to punish them, as men that stirred up sedition among the people.

HAVING thus dismissed *Baruch*, they laid up his roll in the Secretary's office, and presently went into the King, and gave him an account of what had passed both at the Temple and in their hearings, letting him know withal that they had the roll in their custody. When *Jehoiakim* heard this, he sent one of them, *Jahudi*, to fetch it, and ordered him to read it over to him. And when he had heard three or four Chapters of it, he took a penknife, and cut it in pieces, and threw it into the fire piecemeal, till he had burnt every line of it. At which impious action, none of the company rent their garments, as it was usual in such cases: Only three of them interceded with the King, that he would have spared the roll, but when he had destroyed it, they were easy, and shewed no farther concern about it.

WHEN

§ I

AND

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AND now orders were issued forth, and proclamation made, that if any one knew where *Jeremiah* and *Baruch* were, they should seize them and bring them to justice, as traitors to the King, and enemies to the Commonwealth: But God was their Protector, so that no man was able to hurt them. And he commanded the Prophet to expostulate with *Jehoiakim* for burning his roll, and to write another immediately, wherein he was to repeat the former denunciations against King and People, and to add besides several others to them.

AND this is all which *Jehoiakim* got by burning the prophecy of *Jeremiah*, wherein he betrayed the weakness of all wicked men, in putting the evil day far from him. If indeed he could have truly said, *The danger is over as soon as this is burnt*, or the burning of this will save *Jerusalem* from the fire of the *Chaldeans*, he might have gloried in what he had done. But then with how cheap a sacrifice might all wicked men atone the divine Wrath, and prevent their punishment? Not by amending their lives, but by abolishing the Ministry of God's word, and not suffering the man to come near them, who should dare to bring them a threatening message in his name. Is not this a poor delusory way of giving ease to an evil conscience? And yet this is the best means which sinners commonly have for their present security, to keep their eyes from seeing, and their ears from hearing every thing which shews them the danger of their ways.

THIS is what provoked *Jehoiakim* to cut *Baruch's* roll in pieces and throw it into the fire, because here his picture was drawn, and shown to himself and his people in such features as were true indeed, but very deformed and disagreeable. Let us turn back to chap. xxii. which made part of this roll, and there we have the Prophet addressing



himself to this King by name, and telling him that he was commanded of God to reprove him for his oppression, violence, and shedding of innocent blood; and that he was so intent upon the pursuit of his lusts, that he could not turn away from them, tho' it were to save himself and his whole Kingdom. He tells him that God put it to his choice, whether he would establish his throne in righteousness, by executing Judgment and Justice upon it, or persist in his evil ways, and so bring himself to the *burial of an ass*; which the Prophet foretold would be the end of his present doings; and so it came to pass. For being taken by the *Chaldeans*, as they were carrying him captive to *Babylon*, he died by the way, and they would not stand to bury him, but threw his body into a ditch, where it lay exposed to the heat by day, and to the frost by night, as the Prophet had seen it in his divine Vision.

THIS was the reward of his shedding innocent blood, particularly the blood of *Urijah* the Prophet, who lived in his reign, and prophesied in the same style, and of the same things with *Jeremiah*. This Minister of God, *Jehoiakim* pursued with a resolution to take away his life: Which *Urijah* being aware of, arose and fled into *Egypt*, thinking there to find a place of refuge. But *Jehoiakim* being in friendship with the *Egyptian* King, had intimation of him, and sent and fetched him thence, and slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people. For a recompence of which cruelty, his alliance with the *Egyptian* turned to his destruction, and his own dead body was cast out like the brutes, upon the face of the Earth, without any mourning or funeral rites bestowed upon it.

NOR did his punishment end in his own person, but was extended to his posterity. Our Prophet

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phet in the said xxii chap. styles his son *Jeconiah*, a despised broken idol, a vessel wherein is no pleasure. He and his mother, says *Jeremiah*, shall be cast out into another country where they were not born, and there shall they die. This was fulfilled to a tittle; for we read 2 *Kings* xxiv. that when *Nebuchadnezzar* came against *Jerusalem*, *Jeconiah* went out to him, and surrendred himself, his mother, servants, nobles, and officers: And *Nebuchadnezzar* took them and carried them away to *Babylon*, from whence they never returned. Lastly, the Prophet closes the fore-mentioned Chapter with an exterminating sentence passed upon *Jehoiakim's* whole family. Write him childless, says he, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of *David*, and ruling any more in *Judah*.

Now this, I say, this part of the roll, the xxii chap. of *Jeremiah*, was that which touched *Jehoiakim* to the quick, and made him abhor this writing and throw it into the fire, that so, if possible, no eye might ever see, nor ear hear any more of it. For tho' there were other passages in it, which were full of God's wrath against the iniquities of the times, yet they were thrown amongst sinners in general; or if they were pointed at any one in particular, yet they were below the royal family. But this xxii chap. is an expresse message to *Jehoiakim* and his family by name, and it is wholly employed in setting forth the impieties of their lives, and the direful calamities of their deaths: For which reasons *Jehoiakim* was extremely moved at the reading of it.

AND I cannot blame him for being moved at things of so much moment and concern to him and his. For it paints him out as a man loaded with the guilt of enormous sins, and just ready to receive the stroke of divine Vengeance for the punishment

nishment of them. Which must needs be a scene of terror, when lively represented, to the highest upon Earth. But his fault lay, in directing his passion to improper objects, and giving a wrong turn to his indignation. He raged against the word of God, and the Prophet who was the Messenger of it; when he should have descended into himself, and have compared the deformities of his soul, with the description given of them. Was the description plain, and without any mixture of flattery? He knew, or might know, that God was the author of it, who was not to flatter his creatures, but to speak like their Lord and Judge, in a plain and free style. As to the Prophet, he had no reason to be angry at him; for he knew him to be no more than the conveyance, by whose tongue the words were spoken, and who was obliged by his office neither to add to them, nor diminish from them. He should have considered, that every man of an ingenuous mind, and most of all a King, should be always ready to see his own faults, and esteem it as the greatest degree of royal virtue, to conquer himself and triumph over his own sinful lusts and passions; no more enduring such blemishes in himself, than he would have perpetual spots and clouds to eclipse the Light of the World.

If *Jehoiakim* had been innocent of the pride, oppression, sensuality, and neglects of Government which are here charged upon him; if, according to the word of God by *Amos*, v. 14. *he had caused judgment to run down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream* to visit all the corners of his dominions, to refresh the poor, the fatherless, and the widow, to nourish the virtues of sobriety and temperance, of chastity and modesty, of merciful dealing, mutual forbearance, just weights and measures among his people; if this had been his known



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aim and endeavour, who durst have writ such a roll as is here before us? Who durst have brought it into the Temple and the Palace, and have read it in the ears of Princes and People? He who should have presumed to do this, would quickly have felt the hand of God and man against him, he would have been justly accounted a firebrand from the infernal pit, an instrument of the father of lies, one who had confidence enough to out-face the Sun at noon-day. *Jehoiakim* would securely have despised his threatnings, as having done nothing to deserve them; and he would have served himself most effectually of his roll, not by cutting it in pieces, but by causing it to be read publickly in all the Cities of his Kingdom, that his people who were happy under his Government, might see how grossly it was defamed, and might detest the authors of such infamy. Or if *Jehoiakim*, being guilty of the charge, had been awakened by it to look about him, had received it as a summons from Heaven to call him to repentance, had set about comparing his ways with it, and finding them very wrong, had resolved to rectify them by the strait line of God's Law; even so he would not have abolished this roll, but have kept it by him as his faithful monitor, and have read it often, that it might alarm him, and stir up his spirit to do all that was directed for the preservation of himself and his people.

BUT when he cuts and burns it, he acts the desperate man, who was conscious of the iniquities laid to his charge, but resolved not to amend them. And herein he made good that other part of his character given him in this roll, xxii. 21. *I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, said God, but thou saidst, I will not bear: this hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice.* *Jehoiakim* was much such a Governour as that *Gallio*, whom

whom we read of *Acts* xviii. who could see justice violated at his very Tribunal, and pass it over without any concern. His eyes and his heart were so entirely turned to the pursuit of his ambitious and covetous designs, as the Prophet tells him, to be very rich, and very stately, that he was not at leisure to see how justice lay bleeding in every vein all over his Kingdom; nor to hear how God was blasphemed and all goodness outraged by the tongues of drunkards, atheists, libertines of all sorts, in every street and corner of his City.

It was not for nothing therefore that God had doomed him to be buried like an ass when he was dead, for he had the stupidity and indolence of that creature while he was living. Tho' the *Babylonians* were knocking at his gates, and tho' the Prophet told him their business was to ravage his City, and carry him into captivity; yet nothing could awake him to see that his corruptions had brought all this upon him; nothing could prevail with him to leave his sensual delights and vanities, and apply his heart to a serious reformation and repentance, which was the only way to reconcile himself to God, and obtain help from him against his enemies. But when a scheme of reformation was brought to him from the dictates of the Spirit of God, and the necessity of executing it speedily was enforced by the present distress; instead of practising it, he threw it into the fire, and at the same time cast away all farther thought or concern about it.

BUT alas! what a wild and senseless expedient was this, to make himself easy! If he questioned whether the message contained in this roll, were really the word of God, he should have taken the pains to compare it with such books as were acknowledged to be the Law and the Prophets: And he should have perused the Histories of the Kings  
who

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who went before him, and have learned from thence how God had dealt both with the observers and the transgressors of those sacred rules; and what it was which God had formerly complained of, and how it was reformed so as to pacify his anger. If *Jehoiakim* had acted thus, he had done well. But this is to suppose him to be a man capable of serious thinking, who, tho' he had gone wrong for a time, yet had sense enough to quit his evil ways, when he saw the danger of them; whereas this man was only fit to fill the throne of a Kingdom which was near its dissolution, and to be at the head of a people who were ripe for destruction.

HOWEVER, his conduct has produced for us the useful lesson in the words of my Text, That the highest power upon Earth cannot destroy the word of God; for tho' the hand of man may abolish the Books and Records of it, yet shall they be restored again, to expose the vanity of such an attempt, to glorify him who is higher than the highest, and to make known his whole will to the children of men. *Jehoiakim* burnt the prophecy of *Jeremiah*, and yet we have it entire at this day. Many other enemies of God's Church, as great as he, have burnt that and the rest of our sacred Books since that time, and yet how numerous are they at this day, in those very Cities and Places where they were once burnt? This brings to my mind those passages of that very word which bid defiance to all that men and devils can do against it. As *First*, that of *Solomon*, *There are many devices in the heart of man, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord shall stand.* Secondly, that of *Isaiah* xl. 8. *Man is but as grass which withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever.* Thirdly, Those sayings of our Lord, that not one jot or tittle of the Law or the Prophets shall fail, till all be fulfilled. *Heaven and Earth shall pass*



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*pass away, says he, but my word shall not pass away. I have built my Church upon such a rock, that all the powers of hell shall not be able to prevail against it.*

But what pains do they incur who fight against the truth of God, and endeavour to quench the light of it? Suppose they can for a while banish it from their own habitations, can they cancel the Records of God in Heaven, which he keeps of every man's words and deeds, whereby he shall be judged? Can they draw such an universal blot over the register of their own conscience, that it shall not rise up in judgment against them and accuse them? Observe what God says to Ezekiel, chap. ii. *Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, impatient children and stiff-hearted: and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them.* They can stop their ears against their *Isaiahs, Jeremiahs, Ezekiels*, they can sacrifice their persons, they can burn their Books: But they cannot hinder me from justifying my dealings with them to all the world, by making it known that I have raised up such Prophets among them, and how by their Ministry I have abundantly warned them to refuse the evil and chuse the good. They can never be able to blot it out of their memories, but must acknowledge upon occasion, that I have sent such Prophets among them. And consequently they shall have no unrighteousness to charge upon me at the last day, when I shall make it appear, that I did not visit and punish them, without first giving them sufficient warning by such Prophets. Let them be impenitent as they will, yet they and all the world shall know that I have done my part by sending my Prophets among them.

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To the same purpose does our great Prophet, our Lord Jesus Christ, speak to his hearers. *The word that I have given you, the same shall judge you at the last day.* You may tear my Gospels, you may blaspheme my Miracles, but they shall be imputed to you, as means proper to have converted you, and led you to repentance. I shall make it appear, that I have done such works amongst you, as were never done before; such as would have saved even Sodom and Gomorrah, had they been wrought among them. If they have no good effect upon you, yet they shall not fall to the ground, they shall turn to your greater condemnation, and the divine Justice shall triumph, and be glorified in taking the longer vengeance on you for your grosser infidelity.

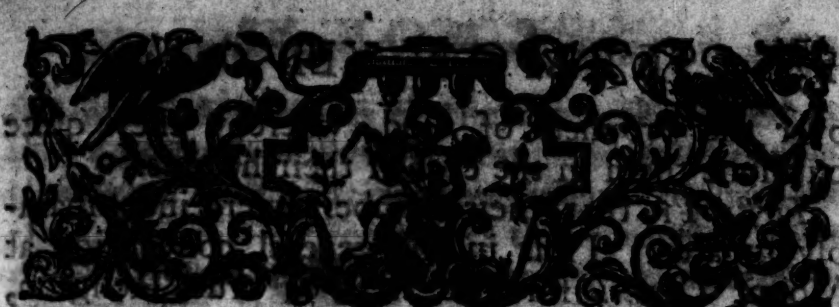
WHEN *Jeremiah* and *Baruch* writ over the second roll, they were directed by God to add several things to it which were not in before: Aggravations no doubt of *Jehoiakim's* punishment for his impious burning of the first roll. And very just it was that his doom should be aggravated. For shall every abuse of temporal blessings be imputed, as it certainly shall, to wicked men, to enflame their reckoning at the last day; and shall spiritual wantonness and intemperance be overlooked, and escape such imputation? If so, then the supreme Judge would not observe that adequate measure and proportion, which we are sure he will be found at the last day to have held in all his dispensations.

WHAT needs more to be said to admonish us all to set a watch, a guard over our hearts and tongues, that we be not blasphemers of God's holy Name, hinderers or slanderers of his Word, despisers and scorers of his sacred Ordinances? Since every blasphemy, contempt and scoff shall add to the heat of our furnace, and the number  
of

of our stripes. Wo be to such as laugh in this manner now, for they shall bitterly mourn and weep. Let us not turn the grace of God into wantonness, and push back the overtures of salvation, as if it were unworthy of our acceptance. Let us behave our selves with that gravity and reverence which may speak our sense of the divine Presence and Inspection over us, and with that esteem of God's holy Word and Sacraments as may convince the world that we believe them to be the means of everlasting life, and are truly thankful for them, and are seriously preparing our selves by them to be received at the end of our days to a nearer communion with the God of all wisdom, holiness, and truth, thro' the merits of his Son *Jesus Christ* our Lord, to whom &c.

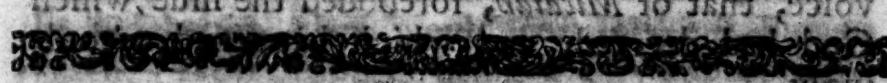






# SERMON XLI.

*On the Sixteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*



EZEKIEL xlii. 4.

*O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts.*

**T**WO evils there were which were common to the Jews, and brought them in the end to utter desolation, viz. their listening to false Prophets, and their deafness to the true: For which they were remarkable at sundry times, but more especially when they were upon the brink of any grievous calamity: Of which when God forewarned them by his messengers the true Prophets, telling them that he was about to scourge them for their impieties, and calling them to repentance in order to their preservation, then there always started up a number of false Prophets, who contradicted such denunciations of divine Judgments, assuring the people that God was at peace with them, and that they might rest secure of his Favour and Protection. And these Impostors had two advantages

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over the Prophets of God, whereby they quite outshone them in the eyes of their hearers.

*First*, IN that their numbers were incomparably greater. Thus in the general convention at Mount Carmel for the trial of true Religion, King *Abab* produced four hundred and fifty Prophets of *Baal* against one single servant of the true God, the Prophet *Elijah*. And again, in his council of war about his expedition against *Ramoth-Gilead*, he had four hundred Prophets for him to one against him. Four hundred of them promised him victory in the name of the Lord, and only one dissentient voice, that of *Micaiah*, foreboded the issue which God had decreed, and which happened accordingly.

AND I doubt not but his successors continuing a bad state of Religion (for *Jehu* and his whole line departed not from *Jeroboam's* sins) the number of false Prophets prevailed against the true, till *Israel* was carried away captive by the *Affyrians*. As for *Judah*, how it swarmed with these deceivers at the beginning of the *Babylonian* captivity, appears from the frequent complaints of *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*, who lived at those times, and were continually opposed and run down by them.

*Secondly*, THE false Prophets were more acceptable to the generations wherein they lived, than the true, because they never saw any thing but peace and prosperity, they liberally dispensed their blessings and encomiums upon their Governors and present state of affairs, they were entirely obsequious to all that were in authority, and out-run them in their zeal for every thing which they saw them inclinable to establish or practise; they were very courteous and good-humoured to all sorts of men, except only to such of their own profession as spoke nothing but plain truth in the name of the Lord, which being very inconsistent with the fashions

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fashions and humours of the times they lived in, they commonly obliged a great majority of people, by making a jest of these troublesome Prophets and their sayings; and sometimes they procured them to be arrested and thrown into prison, as enemies of their Country, which at the same time raised their own character, as the truest friends and defenders of it.

Of such various treatment *Jeremiah* complains in the Book of his Prophecy. First, he says, chap. xi. that the men of *Anathoth*, the place of his habitation and inheritance, threatened him, that if he went on to prophesie in the name of the Lord, as he had begun, they would certainly put him to death. Now *Anathoth* being a City appropriated to the Priests, as we read *Joshua* xxi. 18. we must say, that these were false Prophets, i. e. irreligious and time-serving Priests, who thus conspired against him. Secondly, He tells, chap. xx. how *Pashur*, a chief Priest of the Temple, upon hearing him prophesie, struck him, and set him in the stocks which were in the high gate of *Benjamin* near the Temple; and that upon this occasion he was made the subject of derision and mockery; and idle fellows turned his prophecy into a kind of ballad, and sung it about the streets to make it contemptible. Thirdly, In the beginning of the reign of *Jehoiakim*, he says, chap. xxvi. that God commanded him to go and stand in the court of the Temple, and declare before all the Cities of *Judah* which came up to worship, that if they would not hearken now to the divine Warnings, and walk in the Law of God, he would make the Temple as desolate as *Shiloh*, and *Jerusalem* a curse to all Nations of the Earth. The Prophet performed his charge; but as soon as he had done, the Priests, and Prophets, and People at their instigation, laid hold of him, and were leading him out to



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put him to death, which they would soon have done, had not some of the Nobility, who were apprized of it, hastened thither, and rescued him out of their hands. *Fourthly*, In the fourth year and fifth month of Zedekiah's reign, Hananiah the Prophet confronted Jeremiah in the Temple, in the presence of the Priests and all the People there assembled, and declared with the greatest gravity and assurance, saying, *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring again into this place, all the vassals of the Lord's house, which Nebuchadnezzar has taken away and carried to Babylon. And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah that went into Babylon, saith the Lord; for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.* Now tho' this was directly contrary to what Jeremiah had asserted, yet so great a concern had he for the welfare of his Nation, and so heartily did he wish that God would repent him of the evil which he had threatned, that he said *Amen* with a loud voice to Hananiah's prophecy, and added, *The Lord do so, the Lord perform the words which thou hast prophesied*: And he parted with Hananiah in such a manner as if he hoped to find his words verified; but he had not gone far, before the Spirit of God revealed it to him, that this Hananiah was an Impostor, and remanded him back to tell him, *The Lord hath not sent thee, but thou makest this people to trust in a lie; wherefore the Lord will cut thee off from the face of the earth, and thou shalt die this year, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord.* Accordingly Hananiah died, and nothing of what he had prophesied came to pass. Which I note the more particularly, to expose the monstrous impiety of these false Prophets, who would so seriously and solemnly affirm things in the name of

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of God which they knew to be false, that they would even stagger the faith of the true Prophets, and make them doubt of the certainty of their own revelations. *Jerem. xxviii.*

MUCH to the same purpose, and about the same time, is that passage in the next Chapter concerning *Shemaiah*, a false Prophet among the *Jewish* Exiles in *Chaldea*; to which Exiles when *Jeremiah* had written, exhorting them to live quietly there, and not hearken to the Prophets among them, who deluded them with vain hopes of a speedy return home; for that God had decreed them a seventy years captivity; this *Shemaiah* writ back to all the People at *Jerusalem*, and particularly to *Zephaniah* the Priest, saying, 'Hath the Lord made you an officer in his house, to keep a watchful eye over madmen, that they set not up for Prophets, and to restrain such pretenders with the correction of the stocks? Why then do not you restrain *Jeremiah* of *Anathoth*, who hath sent to us in *Babylon*, saying, This captivity is long; build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them.' Thus we see how industrious the false Prophets were to get *Jeremiah* imprisoned and punished, which after a while they prevailed for. *First*, *Zedekiah*, in the last year but one of his reign, when the *Chaldean* army besieged *Jerusalem*, shut up this Prophet in the court of the prison of his palace, and gave this reason for it, because he prophesied that both King and City should fall a prey to the *Chaldeans*, chap. xxxii. *Secondly*, A little after, when the enemy raised the siege to fight the *Egyptian* army, which was coming upon them in favour of the *Jews*, and *Jeremiah*, who had got his liberty, told the citizens that the *Chaldeans* would return and burn the City, and was making his own escape out of it, they seized him as a deserter, and im-

prisoned him again, chap. xxxvii. *Thirdly*, Upon his persisting in these predictions, the Jewish Princes threw him into the dungeon of his former prison, chap. xxxviii. where his mouth had been effectually stop'd, for he must have been stifled in the mire of it, if he had not been speedily drawn out at the instance of an *Ethiopian*, servant to *Zedekiah*, who interceded with the King for his deliverance, and prevailed.

Now in all this we see the picture of Jewish atheism, sensuality, and incurable enmity to the truths of God. For we find them continually persecuting *Jeremiah*, while they had continual proofs of the truth of his prophecies, and finally saw them entirely accomplished in the ruin of their Kingdom, and their own captivity. Yet even then they refused to hearken to him. For when upon the dissolution of their Government, *Jehonah* and other Captains of their forces, and all the men under their command, consulted God by the Ministry of *Jeremiah* which way they should dispose of themselves, tho' they applied to him with great solemnity, and bound themselves with an oath to follow his direction, whether it should seem good or evil to them, yet when he forbade them in God's name, and upon pain of his highest displeasure, to go down into *Egypt*, whither they were disposed to go, they were not ashamed to call him false Prophet, and went thither in defiance of their oath, and carried him by force along with them. Whereas if he had really been a false Prophet, he had suffered nothing of all this from them: But they would have treated him as the Servant of God, their dear Friend, a lover of his Country and People, if he had always been of their opinion, and chosen their ways, and bestowed the blessings and best ~~owes~~ of a Prophet upon all their endeavours.

THUS



## Sixteenth Sunday after TRINITY. 135

**Thus** I have opened the state of the Jewish Church and Kingdom at the time when *Ezekiel* prophesied; for he was cotemporary with *Jeremiah*, he was under the influence of the same Spirit, and prophesied of much the same things with him. Particularly as to the mischievous prevalence of false Prophets, he shews it was much the same in *Chaldea*, where he now resided, that *Jeremiah* complains of in *Jerusalem*. And by an apt similitude, he intimates how detrimental they were to God's vineyard and heritage, the land of *Judah*. *O Israel*, says he, *thy prophets are like the fens in the deserts.*

If we conceive of the land of *Judah* as a vineyard (to which it is compared in the *Psalms* and the *Prophets*) we shall see that the false Prophets are fitly represented under the notion of Foxes. For,

*First*, **THESE** creatures are lovers of grapes, as we know by a common proverb; and consequently they did much damage in such Countries as *Judea*, which abounded with vineyards, as is noted *Gen. ii. 15.* not only by devouring the grapes, but also by making holes in the walls and fences, whereby they laid open the vineyards to other ravenous beasts as well as to themselves. Just so did the false Prophets to the Cities of *Judah*: They did not only beguile people of their substance, by the character which they assumed, and the figure which they made among them, but by their false doctrines and subversions of the genuine will and word of God, they broke down the walls and fences from about them, I mean that blessing and protection of the Almighty, which was annexed to the obedience of his own Laws. Nay they broke thro' the walls literally, and without a metaphor: For to their provocations of God, and misguidance of his people it was owing, that the

*Chaldeans* came at three or four several times, in the reigns of *Jehoiakin*, *Jeconiah*, and *Zedekiah*, under whom these Prophets prevailed, and so battered the walls of *Jerusalem* and other places, that at last they laid them level with the ground.

Secondly, IN another respect did these Prophets resemble the Foxes in the deserts, that they could make breaches, but had not the faculty of stopping them up again. *Ye have not gone up into the gaps, says Ezekiel, nor made up the hedge for the house of Israel.* They did not call the people to repentance: Or if they did, it was but to such a superficial fast as we read of *Jerem. xxxvi.* at which they read his prophecy, and then cut it in pieces, and threw it into the fire. Their making up of their breaches this way, was but like the labour of unfaithful builders; one laid the stones in the wall, and others daubed it with untempered mortar.

SOME leading man among them proposed ways and means how they might resist the power of the *Babylonians*, by augmenting their own forces, by making alliances with the *Egyptians* and other Nations, or by any expedient which had a politick appearance; and then all the Prophets, his admirers and followers, built upon it and blessed it in all their discourses. But they took special care not to meddle with such publick lusts as their idolatries had consecrated: For to this end they embraced idolatry, that they might have a religious sanction and colouring for their sins. Here indeed, in demolishing these lusts, they should have begun to dig for a foundation, for repairing the breaches between God and themselves. They should have pulled down pride and oppression, rioting and uncleanness, blasphemy and scurrility which God complained of, and have built in their room justice and judgment, sobriety and modesty,

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By, humility and the fear of God, which he delights in, and then they had laid a good foundation, and built with well-tempered mortar. But now, as their work stands, God threatens to send upon it a stormy wind in his fury, and a tempest of hail and rain in his anger, which should throw down their wall, and discover the rottenness of its foundation, and consume those that are in the midst of it. This tempest was the army of the Chaldeans, which accomplished this threatening.

Thirdly, THESE false Prophets resembled Foxes in their fraudulent practices. By crafty speeches and cunningly devised fables they mis-led the hearts of the simple. They studied how to suit their discourses to the various tempers of the people whom they conversed with, to prophesie smooth things to the stout-hearted, and terrible things to the timorous, that they might keep them all in the way which they would have them to walk in. This is what God charges upon them in this xiii chap. of Ezekiel. *Ye slay the souls that should not die, and save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies. Ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad, and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his evil way, by promising him life.*

THIS gives us an idea of the arbitrary interpretations which these men put upon holy Writ. For as they spoke to the people in the name of the Lord, so I doubt not but they pretended to discourse consistently with his written word. And that they might make a fair show of this, they would quote with much seeming devotion such Texts as they could turn to favour their purposes, but never touched upon others, which could not be so perverted. Thus, for instance, they might undertake to confute the prophecies of *Jeremiah* and



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and *Ezekiel* concerning their captivity, and the dissolution of their Kingdom, by asserting that God had promised to establish the House and Kingdom of *David* for ever, 2. *Sam.* vii. 16. which could not be verified, if the Kingdom of *Judah*, where alone his family reigned, should be dissolved. But they would hardly confront this promise with that threatening, *Deut.* xxviii. 36. which was antecedent to it, and which forewarns *Israel* in case of apostasy, thus: *The Lord shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, into a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, and there shalt thou serve other Gods, wood and stone.* This proves their conclusion from the promise to be false, for it might be made good to the house of *David*, notwithstanding that some of them, by their sins against God, might fall into the captivity threatened in *Deuteronomy*, and so cause a long interruption in their kingly Office, as in fact it has happened, and as these Prophets might have reasonably interpreted, if they had considered the promise and the threatening together, and compared the manners of their Princes and People with the divine Law. But they were *Fakes*, i. e. time-serving interpreters of God's word; and like their late posterity, the Scribes and Pharisees, and much later Disciples and Pupils in Christian Divinity, they would quote or conceal Texts, just as they pleased, and never wanted such glosses and traditions, as would make Scripture speak that meaning, which their lusts or interests demanded of them.

Thus the Prophets; and no less craftily did the Prophetesses act. For of the other sex also were at several times both true and false teachers in *Israel*. These before us counter-acted the true Prophets by emblems peculiar to their sex. And whereas the true Prophets used a coarse dress to denote the hardships which were approaching with the cap-

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captivity, these Prophetesses made kerchiefs or near head-tires for all such and staturs of their own sex, to intimate that they were not afraid of any hardships: Whence the true Prophets put yokes upon their necks, as a proper emblem of the bondage of their captivity, these women sewed soft pillows under the arms of their female domesticks and scholars, signifying thereby that they expected times of rest and peace.

*Fourthly,* These false Prophets had another property of Foxes, which was a prouling ravenous appetite. When they came out of their colleges into the vineyard (for in such places they were educated as well as better men) they resolved that the making of their fortune, the arriving at a plentiful condition, a goodly heritage, should be the first and greatest of all their cares. So little were they concerned for the welfare of the people, over whom they pretended to be guardians and spiritual watchmen, that they would sell their souls, as God complains here, *for handfuls of barley and morsels of bread.* The sacrifices which they offered most frequently, and studied to render most acceptable, were to Princes and great Men, whom they worshipped and served much more diligently than they did the divine Majesty: Towards them they were careful to order their words and conversation in the most obsequious and respectful manner, to be of their opinions, to have the same friends and enemies, the same notions of Religion, and of virtue and vice, and in every thing to be like them. Not that they really loved one man more than another, or a prince above a peasant, for their love all centred in themselves, but it was the station, the power which they courted, which was able to illustrate them with the beams of worldly honours, and make them shine in the eyes of the people, and attract their esteem and admiration. For vulgar eyes

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eyes are dazzled with pompous appearance, and generally conclude that real worth resides wherever they see the rewards and ornaments of it. And therefore these false Prophets, whose sensual appetites were rank and predominant, laboured for nothing so much as to move in a high sphere; no matter how they ascended; they knew that most who looked up at them, would read their own merits in their exaltation.

*Lastly*, As Foxes are of the number of unclean beasts, so these Prophets were men of corrupt minds and loose morals. How prone they were to prevaricate with God, and seduce the People, to counterfeit a divine Mission, to run when they were not sent, to prophesie out of their own heart without a revelation, to proclaim their visions of peace, when there was no peace; is abundantly set forth in this xlii of *Ezekiel*. And it is very natural to conclude that they were libertines in eating, drinking, and other sensual enjoyments, when we consider that they had no spiritual affections, nor any regard for Religion as such, but only as it was a way to advance them in the world, to bring them into the acquaintance and friendship of great men, to make them considerable in the Government, to gain them esteem and interest with the people, to recommend them to advantageous marriages, and the like. Nay *Jeremiah* charges them with grosser sensuality, chap. xxiii. 9. where he speaks of their lewdness with horror, in these words; 'My heart is broken within me, all my bones shake because of the Prophets. For the land is full of adultery by their encouragement: Because of swearing the land mourneth, thro' the prophaneness of Prophets and Priests. The Prophets of *Jerusalem* commit adultery, they walk in lies, they strengthen the hands of evil doers, that none doth return from his wickedness;



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‘ness: They are all of them unto me, as Sodom,  
‘and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah: For  
‘from the Prophets of Jerusalem is prophaneness  
‘gone forth into all the land.’

THIS may serve for a short answer to that ques-  
tion which some will be apt to move, how the  
people could know the false Prophets from the  
true. They might easily know them, not only by  
the failure of their predictions, but by the enormi-  
ties of their lives, which were so wide of the Law  
of God, and the conversation of his real faithful  
servants, *that it was impossible*, might any one say,  
*for any degree of the holy Spirit of God to inspire such*  
*men.*

UNHAPPY Israel and men of Judah! whose  
Canaan was guarded by such treacherous watchmen  
as helped to devour it, and broke down the fences  
of it, and exposed it to the judgments of God;  
and the arms of foreign invaders. But yet these  
people have left us no room to pity them; for their  
unhappiness was of themselves; it was owing to  
their own choice and conduct. Witness all their  
true Prophets, but especially these two here before  
us. *We are under these horrid circumstances,* says  
Jeremiab, v. 30. *that our prophets prophesie falsely,*  
*and our people love to have it so.* He tells us they  
would not endure those who reprov’d their favou-  
rite corruptions; and alarmed them with the judg-  
ments of war and captivity as ready to fall upon  
them, except they repented. No, they would  
hear none but such as entertained them with  
smooth and pleasant discourses, and assured them  
that God was at peace with them, and well satis-  
fied with their state of Religion and Virtue. And  
when any Prophet had the courage to deal faith-  
fully and truly with them, to measure their evil  
ways by the line of God’s Law, to shew them  
their perverseness, and the destruction which hung  
over

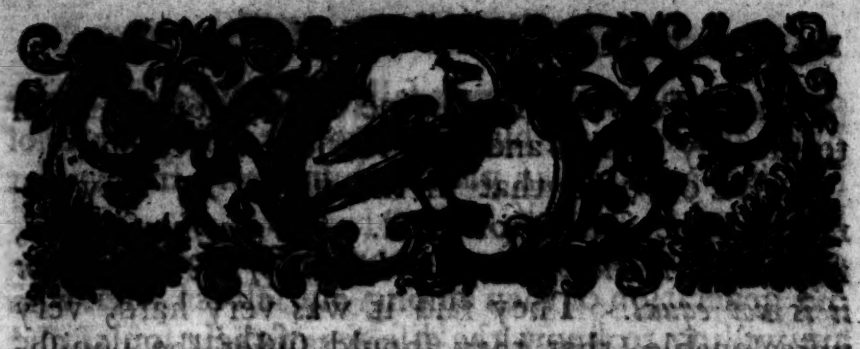
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over them, they never failed to discomfite him, and to bring him into trouble, and danger of his life, as *Jeremiah* proves abundantly from what happened to himself.

MAY we hope for a more corrigible and candid generation of men among our selves! Men who are willing to know the diseases of their souls, and to be cured of them! Men, who tho' they will not presently follow the admonitions of the Prophet, yet are so far friends to sincerity and truth, as to hear him patiently, and to respect him, defend him, maintain him for doing his duty! Men who hate to be flattered, &c. abused, in cases of the last moment to their souls and bodies! If we cannot hope for numerous assemblies of such men, yet we will pray, even against hope, that those of a contrary disposition may not be so unhappy as to have false Prophets for their guides, who will harden them in their errors, and hasten their destruction. We will pray that God would so bless our Christian *Canaan*, the spiritual vineyard which he hath planted amongst us, that it may not be a portion for such Foxes as were the ruin of *Israel*. We will pray that all the Ministers and Dispensers of God's word may boldly rebuke vice, and faithfully declare his whole will to the people, after the example of their great Master, who has made himself a pattern of this courage and impartiality, *Jesus Christ* our Lord, to whom &c.



SER-



# SERMON XLII.

On the Seventeenth Sunday after TRINITY.



EREMIE xviii. 31, 32.

Cast away from you all your Transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new Heart and a new Spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn your selves, and live ye.

**I**N this Chapter the Almighty is pleased to expostulate with the Jews upon the account of a Saying which was so common in their mouths, that it was become a proverb, viz. *The Fathers have eaten sower grapes, and the Childrens teeth are set on edge.* By which they plainly meant, That the calamities of war and captivity which they suffered under the reigns of *Jehoiakim, Jeconiah, and Zedekiah*, were brought upon them, not by their own, but their Ancestors sins.

THIS



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THIS Proverb the Divine Oracle forbids them to use any more: and that for several reasons.

I. BECAUSE that in the use of it, they attained the justice of God. *The house of Israel, says Ezekiel, crieth out upon the way of the Lord, that it is not equal.* They said it was very hard, very unreasonable, that they should suffer the punishment of sins which their forefathers had committed many years ago, before they were born into the World, of which they were neither authors nor instruments, and were sorry for them, but never had the power or opportunity to prevent them.

II. BY this Saying they shifted off the blame from themselves, as if they had done nothing to incense the Divine Wrath against them. For tho' they are characterized by *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* as a most corrupt generation of men, yet we hear how blind they were to their own demerits: Their Fathers, and not they, had eaten fower grapes; they had done nothing to set their own teeth on edge. This was an odious degree of self-conceit and partiality to themselves. They were sick unto death, and could not find out their disease, nor hear of repentance, tho' the Prophets were always telling them they must repent or perish.

III. BY this Proverb the *Jews* confirmed one another in their old evil courses, as thinking it to no purpose to change for the better. 'For,' said they, we must suffer what our Fathers Sins have merited. Our Prophets prophesied the same things to them as they do now to us. And therefore if their visions were true, all that we can do, cannot prevent the accomplishment of them. The Decree is gone forth, the Sentence is passed upon us, and cannot be avoided. So that since we cannot undo what our Fathers have done, we must be content to expect the issue, and need not trouble ourselves about it, for our

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‘our own concern will make it neither better nor worse.’ This seems to me to have been one meaning which the *Jews* had in this Proverb. Which justly moved God to lay an interdict upon it, that it might be utterly dropt and buried in oblivion. For so long as it spoke this sense, and kept up this perswasion in the People, all that God and his Prophets could offer, would never be able to lead them to amendment of life. ‘If we must suffer, said they, for the sins of our parents, our own better lives will not rescue us from suffering.’

THIS was a desperate conclusion, and yet it seems not to be wholly without ground. We can hardly hear this Proverb I am speaking of, and not call to mind that clause of the second Commandment, where God threatens to visit the iniquities of the Fathers upon the Children unto the third and fourth Generation. And there are a great many facts to confirm this. There was a sower Fruit eaten by our first Parents, which hath set all our teeth on edge. And some bold Men, in reasoning upon this case, have irreverently asserted with the *Jews* here before us, that this way of God was unequal. But if this be so, there can be no such thing as Equity in any of the ways of men; for there is no man living in any Country or Kingdom upon Earth, but he may, by breaking Laws and Covenants, forfeit any of the good things of life for himself and his heirs for ever: This is what happens every day some where or other; and any Government is so far from being thought unreasonable for taking such forfeitures, that it is well known there can be no Government without them. Neither God nor Man can inflict a considerable punishment upon Parents, but their Children must in some measure feel the smart of it.

BUT here we must carefully distinguish between those calamities which Parents bring upon their Children, and those which God sends upon them for the Sins of their Parents. If any Man by laziness or lewdness, by an indiscreet management of his Estate, by foolish forfeitures, by riotous spending, drinking, gaming, and the like, reduces his Family from a comfortable livelyhood to a state of beggary; if by reason of his debaucheries his children have a sickly constitution, an ill education, a load of dishonour and contempt thrown upon them: Such poverty, infirmity, irreligion, or infamy of children, cannot be called God's visitation of them for the Sins of their Parents; but it is plainly such a portion as their Parents have directly provided for them, and entailed upon them. The Divine Visitation properly imports an enquiry which the righteous God makes after some sin, either secretly committed, or coloured over with the appearance of justice, or so past over as that it might be thought to have escaped the penalty due to it. And the punishment which attends such visitation is of that sort, that, by what means and instruments soever it is inflicted, yet we may plainly see the will of God in it, and that his hand brings it to pass. But now in the instances I have given of Children's smarting for the Sins of their Parents, the Divine Providence is not at all concerned. The Parents are the natural, necessary, and immediate Authors of their Children's sufferings, and that very contrary to the will of God, who is continually striving with them, by the ministry of his word, to turn them from such ruinous courses; and many times rescues such children, as brands out of the fire, from the pit of destruction into which their Parents vices were ready to plunge them.

So



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So that in many cases, we see the sufferings of Children cannot be called God's visitations of them for the sins of their Parents, but are directly owing to the Parents themselves, being the immediate, unavoidable consequences of their doings.

WE must not however forget, that, besides the second Commandment, there are many other places of Holy Writ, where God threatens to punish Children for the sins of their Parents, and the historical accounts of it show, that such threatenings have been put in execution. Thus God charged the *Israelites*, that in their wars with the *Midianites*, the *Canaanites*, the *Amalekites*, they should kill and slay them all, even to the least sucking child: Thus he destroyed the old World, the Cities of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, and a great many other places. But that which concerns us most to take notice of upon this occasion, is his threatening denounced by *Nathan* to his beloved King *David*, 2 *Sam.* xii. *Because, says he, thou hast killed Uriah with the sword, therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house.* And I think it will be difficult to find any one of his Successors Kings of *Judah*, who did not either come to an untimely end, or had not some secret conspiracy or open war against him, to make him sit uneasy upon his Throne. Thus the sin of their forefather was plainly visited upon them. But several of them did worse than merely suffer for it; they imitated and exceeded it, which still aggravated their own and their Peoples calamities. Particularly *Manasseh* was such an offender this way, that he is set up and pointed out as the principal cause of the *Babylonian* captivity. *He shed innocent blood, says his History, 2 Kings xxi. till he had filled Jerusalem with it, from one end to another.* He caused his children to pass thro' the fire in the

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Valley of the Son of *Hinnom*, 2 *Chron.* xxxiii. and used enchantments and witchcrafts, and dealt with familiar Spirits and Wizards, in which infernal arts he used human sacrifices after the manner of the Heathen: Which provoked God to declare *that he would stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab*, i. e. he would send *Judah* into captivity as well as *Israel*. And tho' *Manasseh's* affliction (for he was bound with fetters and carried to *Babylon*) brought him to a severe repentance, and his repentance prevailed with God to restore him again to his Country and Kingdom, yet the sentence which his sins had drawn upon his People was never reversed, but still more confirmed upon several occasions. Thus 2 *Kings* xxiii. after a high *Encomium* of *Josiah's* reign, it follows, *Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations which Manasseh had provoked him withal. But he said, I will remove Judah out of my sight, as I have removed Israel*, i. e. by captivity. Again, in the next Chapter, when the captivity was begun under *Jehoiakim*, Surely, says the Sacred Text, *at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, and for the innocent blood which he shed, which the Lord would not pardon.* 3. In *Jer.* xv. 4. *I will, says God, cause them to be removed into all Kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the Son of Hezekiah King of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.*

ALL this amounts to a sufficient proof, not only of the general doctrine, *that God visits the iniquities of Parents and Governours upon their Children and Subjects*, but that it was the very case in the captivity of *Judah*, which was very much owing to the provocations of *Manasseh*.

THIS

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THIS the *Jews* of those times, who were sufferers in it, were fully apprized of, for the sayings of the Prophets to this purpose were well known to them; and upon such sayings they seem to have grounded this Proverb, *that the Fathers had eaten sower grapes, and the childrens teeth were set on edge.* And this was so much their perswasion from the beginning to the end of the *Chaldean War*, that we meet with a saying very like this, *Lam. v. 7. Our Fathers have sinned and are not, and we have born their iniquities.*

BUT *Jeremiah*, who wrote this sentence, censures the Proverb in much the same terms with *Ezekiel*; which shows that both sayings are not to be taken in the same sense. *Jer. xxxi. 29. In those days,* says he, speaking of the time when God's wrath should cease towards *Israel*, and he would receive them again to favour, *they shall say no more, The Fathers have eaten a sower grape, and the childrens teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eateth the sower grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.* This is the summary rule of God's Dispensations. Let us now hear how he explains it more at large in this xviii. of *Ezekiel*, which will set the whole of his Visitations in a due light.

FIRST then, God begins his explanation with asserting his supreme and universal dominion over all mankind; *All Souls*, says he, *as well of parents as of children, are mine: And the rule of my dealings with them shall be this, that the wicked shall die, and the righteous shall live.*

NEXT he proceeds to instruct us, who he means by the righteous and the wicked. 'If,' says he, a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right; if he be religious without superstition or idolatry, no adulterer, nor polluted with other carnal lusts; if he take care to



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‘ be first honest, and then charitable; to be so far from oppressing or outraging any man, that he readily pays his debts, renders to all men their due, feeds the hungry, cloaths the naked, and in other things walks according to my Laws and Statutes; ’tis no matter of what parentage he is descended, honourable or despicable, good or evil; I promise him my blessing, he is my servant, he shall surely live.’ This is the first character.

THE next is, of the Son of such an excellent person; ‘ if he should prove degenerate; a robber, a murderer, a whoremonger, an idolater: If he oppresses those that are under him, and denies payment of his just debts: If he has no bowels of compassion for the poor and needy; if he uses frauds and extortions in his dealings; the merits of his righteous Father shall avail him nothing, but he shall die for his own abominations, his blood shall be upon his own head.’

THE third decision is, concerning a Child of this ungracious Son. ‘ If, says God, this wicked man should beget a son, who seeing all his father’s sins, and considering their destructive consequences, avoids them, and does all the duties contained in the first character, he shall fare never the worse for being the son of a wicked father; ruin and destruction shall be far from him; he shall surely live.’

AFTER these, follow two decisions of the case of the same persons in two different conditions. The first is, of a man who having been a wicked liver, repents of the Sins which he has committed, and turns from his evil ways to do that which is lawful and right; of such a one God pronounces, ‘ That he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, shall not be mentioned unto him, nor  
‘ rise

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‘rise up in judgment against him: But in his  
‘righteousness that he hath done, in that shall he  
‘live.’

THE second case is, of a righteous man, who falls from his good ways, to the abominations of the wicked. ‘Shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done, shall be blotted out: In his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sins that he hath committed, in them shall he die.’ These two cases are repeated and inculcated, for the fuller confirmation of them, and to make the deeper impression upon the hearers.

FROM these several cases, thus stated and resolved, two things are inferr’d.

*First*, THAT God neither saves nor destroys children in respect to their parents; but just as their own personal doings shall deserve.

*Secondly*, THAT any man, by changing his course of life, changes his doom in respect of rewards or punishments.

BUT here, after all, it may be demanded with the objectors in this Chapter, *Why? doth not the Son bear the iniquity of the Father?*

TO which I answer, That when children continue to provoke God, as their Fathers had done before them, by committing such sins as are mentioned in this Chapter, then they must expect that the judgments which were threatned to their Fathers, shall be poured out upon them, and that more abundantly, as they have had longer warnings of them. And that this was the case of these very *Jews* to whom *Ezekiel* prophesied, is evident from their History. They were a corrupt seed of evil-doers, they chose to fill up the measure of their Fathers iniquities, rather than to hearken to the voice of the Lord their God, and recover his favour and protection, by doing those things which he commanded them by the mouth of his Holy

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Prophets. What enormities were there, which this Generation was not guilty of? They would be tedious to enumerate, they are easily seen, they fill up every page of the Prophets. And what did God require of these men, in order to be reconciled to them? No more but this: 'Turn you from your evil ways, and I will turn from the fierceness of mine anger: Do you forbear to provoke me with your Impieties, and I will forbear to punish you with my Judgments.'

HERE was a gracious door of repentance opened to these Sinners for their escape; and we see in my Text that the Prophet held it open to the last, even to the beginning of their desolation. *Cast away from you all your transgressions, and make you a new Heart and a new Spirit: For why will ye die, O house of Israel?* 'Are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Do not I offer you fair, cheap, and easie conditions of reconciliation? And after long waiting and importunate solicitations, ye refuse to comply with them. Therefore the hardship of your sufferings lyes at your own doors.'

THE plea which these men urged, to excuse themselves from repenting, had more of sullen humour, than any good reason in it. 'Our God,' said they, has told us, that he visits the iniquities of Fathers upon their Children; and he hath said expressly, that he will cast us out of his sight, for the provocations of our King *Manasseh*. 'Therefore our Repentance will not save us.' This was a sullen, wrangling way of arguing, and what they knew to be flatly contrary both to the general method of God's dealings, and to the particular overtures which he had made since that threatening. They knew that all God's threatnings were conditional, not to be executed, but in case of impenitence. They knew moreover, that God  
had



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had solemnly and frequently promised them, by these two Prophets, *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*, that if they would repent, they should still live happily in their Land of *Canaan*. Had he told them before that their *Manasseh's* abominations had merited all the plagues of sword, famine, pestilence, and captivity; How much should this danger have recommended their escape? How eagerly should they have embraced the hand, which was graciously offer'd to pluck them from the brink of destruction?

WHEN I hear them murmuring at God, and taxing him with cruelty, for threatening to account with them for their ancestors debts, methinks I hear the transaction between the Lord and the unprofitable Servant, as 'tis represented in the Gospel. ' Lord, says the servant, I have not  
' improved your Talent, for I was afraid I should  
' not satisfy you, as knowing you to be a hard  
' Master, reaping where you have not sown, and  
' gathering where you have not straw'd. Say you  
' so? says his Lord. Well; tho' I do not allow  
' the character you give of me, yet I'll take you  
' at your word, and show you that your own  
' mouth hath condemned you. For if you took  
' me to be such an austere and exacting Master,  
' you should have used the more diligence to have  
' pleased me: But now you have used none.  
' Wherefore such a Master must, according to  
' your own apprehension, needs punish such a Ser-  
' vant.' With the like reason might God have  
said to these *Jews*: ' Are you persuaded that I  
' will accomplish in your Days the Judgments  
' wherewith I threatned to punish your sinful An-  
' cestors? Why then do you continue to provoke  
' me with the same Sins? Men who apprehend  
' my severity, as you do, will either hearken to  
' my Servants the Prophets, and repent, or their  
' blood

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‘ blood will be upon their own head; they will  
‘ be self-condemn’d whenever I punish them.’

WHEN the Scripture affirms that God visits the iniquities of parents upon their children, or in other words, that he transfers the punishment of one generation to another, this speaks the forbearance and long-suffering of God, how patiently he waits upon Sinners, to see if they will consider at last, and hearken to overtures of peace, and embrace the means of their own Salvation.

To such children as repine at the justice of God for not taking vengeance of their sinful parents, belongs the confession of the prodigal Son; *Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son.* Such Children were unworthy to be born into the World: For they resemble the Heir of an Estate, who should say to his Father’s Creditor, ‘ Why  
‘ did you not arrest my Father, and save me the  
‘ trouble of paying his debt?’ The generous Creditor answers, ‘ If I had arrested your Father, I  
‘ had ruined you in him. For his Family’s sake  
‘ I spared him, hoping to see his heir make a good  
‘ use of my money. ’Tis true, I often threatned  
‘ him, because I saw him addicted to such a  
‘ course of life as tended to every thing that is  
‘ dishonourable and calamitous. And now I come  
‘ upon you his heir, because I see that, contrary  
‘ to my desires and counsels, you tread in the  
‘ same steps. However, I offer you as I did him,  
‘ that if you will but approve your self a pious  
‘ and virtuous man, I will not only forgive you  
‘ the debt, but will do all that lies in my power  
‘ to make you and yours a happy family.’

THIS is exactly the language of the Almighty to the Generation of *Israel* here before us. ‘ I  
‘ have no pleasure in the death of a Sinner. I  
‘ do not desire to take the rigour of the Law up-  
‘ on

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on any of you. I will not require the Son to bear the iniquity of the Father, nor the Father to bear the Sins of his Children. Every one shall bear his own burden.' This is what God expressly says in this xviiiith of *Ezekiel*. And it is the meaning of all his Exhortations and Perswasives to repentance throughout the Bible. *He that doth righteousness, shall surely live, he shall not die.* He shall not die eternally. Neither shall he die a spiritual death. The sins of a man's Ancestors or Descendents shall never trouble his conscience, if he has been no way the occasion of them, but has honestly done all that was incumbent upon him to prevent them, or to make satisfaction for them: Neither shall they subject such a man to the providential misfortunes of this life. I have explained before how the debaucheries of Parents may entail calamities upon their Children, which can by no means be styled God's Visitations; he has no hand in them. I am now saying, that a pious and virtuous Son cannot be obnoxious to the Divine Justice for the sins of his Father: And consequently cannot suffer for them even in the things of this Life. I do not say, that he may not change his condition in various respects, that he may not be carried into captivity by the stream of a Visitation for his Father's iniquities; but I say that such a change shall not prove a real calamity to a Child who is in the favour of God. I appeal to the case of *Daniel* and his three Friends, who were carried away to *Babylon* in the first captivity under *Jeboiakim*. What could be a greater punishment than their sufferings? The first was cast into a den of Lions, the others into a fiery Furnace. Behold here how the piety of these Men prevailed over the demerits of their parents and governours. Their sufferings (I should say the formality of suffering) raised them to



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to a threefold State of Glory : To be Princes in *Babylon*, to be Saints in Heaven, to be praised and admired throughout all the Earth. An incomparable seal of the truth of God's promise here before us, *that the righteous Son shall not die for the iniquity of his Father ; he shall surely live.*

YOU think you are a sufferer for the Sins of your Parents ; and you do well to think so. If any of them were robbers, murderers, whoremongers, oppressors of the poor and needy, &c. you have reason for your apprehension. But then, does this apprehension incite you to cry mightily to God, that he would not remember the iniquities of your Forefathers ? Does it fill you with a concern to make satisfaction for their frauds and oppressions, by offering restitution where you think it is due, and by abounding in your charity to the poor and needy ? Does it arm you with a resolution to avoid those sins more especially, which have been, as I may say, hereditary in your Family ? and to distinguish your self as much on the other hand, with the contrary virtues ? These things are what God plainly requires of you in this Chapter, which if you honestly perform, you shall not suffer for the iniquities of your Forefathers.

CAST away therefore all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new Heart and a new Spirit, by a serious use of that efficacious medicine of the Soul, Repentance ; whereby the Son of an impious Father, is made a Child of God ; whereby the greatest Debtor to Divine Justice blots out all his transgressions, so that they shall not be once mention'd against him ; whereby he that was once dead in sins and trespasses, shall be recovered to life, and live for ever, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom &c.

SERMON



# SERMON XLIII.

*On the Eighteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*



EZEKIEL xxiv. 24.

*Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done, shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I am the Lord God.*

**B**EFORE we enter into the matter of this Chapter, we must, for the better understanding of it, observe two things, which I have formerly intimated. *First*, That the author of it was now an Exile in the province of *Babylon*, being of the number of those *Jews* whom *Nebuchadnezzar* carried away in his second invasion of *Judæa* in the reign of *Jeconiah*. *Secondly*, That he and his brethren of the captivity were very much divided in their opinion about the duration of it. For they were perswaded that their Kingdom, their City of *Jerusalem*, and their Temple there, should never be destroyed. And in this perswasion they were confirmed by many false Prophets, who undertook to prove this, both from the promises of God made  
to

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to their forefathers, and from immediate revelations which he had made to themselves. Thus *Hananiah* publicly declared in the Temple, that the Lord God of *Israel* had said, *I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon, &c. Jer. xxviii.* And to the same purpose prophesied *Ahab* the son of *Kolaiab*, *Zedekiah* the son of *Maaseiah*, *Shemaiah* the *Nebelamite*, and other false Prophets, who were amongst the Exiles: Who caused them to repine at their hard fortune, and to esteem their countrymen, who remained in *Judea*, much happier than themselves, and to think of nothing but a speedy return to their families and possessions.

BUT now *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* read them a quite contrary doom from the mouth of God. The former expostulated with King *Zedekiah*, and with all the Priests and People, saying, ‘Why  
‘will ye die by sword, famine, and pestilence,  
‘which ye bring upon your selves by an ineffectual opposition which ye make to the army of  
‘the *Chaldeans*? Harken not to the Prophets  
‘which tell you, ye shall not serve the King of  
‘*Babylon*; for they prophesie a lie. If they be  
‘true Prophets, and if the word of the Lord be  
‘with them, let them now make intercession to  
‘the Lord of Hosts, that the vessels in the Temple and in the Palace at *Jerusalem*, be not carried to *Babylon*. *Jerem. xxvii.* The *Chaldeans*  
‘which fight against this City, shall come and  
‘set it on fire, and burn the houses upon whose  
‘roofs ye have offered incense unto *Baal*, and  
‘poured out drink-offerings unto other Gods.  
‘*Jerem. xxxii.* The Lord will make *Jerusalem*  
‘heaps, a den of dragons: He will make the Cities of *Judah* desolate, without an inhabitant.  
‘Because ye have polluted his house with idols,  
‘and committed abominations in it, he will cast  
‘it down even to the ground. You have not suffered



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‘fered the Land to enjoy her sabbaths according  
‘to the Law of the Lord, *Exod. xxiii.* which  
‘commands you, saying, Six years shall ye sow  
‘your Land, and gather in the fruits thereof: But  
‘the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie still:  
‘And what it produces that year, shall be for the  
‘poor people, and the beasts of the field. Now  
‘you have not observed the sabbatical year, but  
‘have plowed and sowed in it, as if there were  
‘no such Law which I have mentioned: There-  
‘fore ye shall go into captivity, that your Land  
‘may enjoy her sabbaths; according to the num-  
‘ber of your transgressions of this kind, so shall  
‘your captivity be, even seventy years shall your  
‘Land lie desolate, that it may enjoy the number  
‘of sabbatical years, which are due to it by the  
‘divine Law.

‘MOREOVER the Lord God of *Israel* made a  
‘covenant with your fathers, that at the end of eve-  
‘ry seven years, they should release and set at li-  
‘berty every man of the *Hebrews* their brethren,  
‘who had been sold unto them for servants: But  
‘neither you nor your fathers have obeyed the  
‘words of this Law. Therefore behold the Lord  
‘proclaims liberty to the sword, to the famine, and  
‘to the pestilence to devour you, and ye shall be  
‘removed into all the Kingdoms of the Earth,  
‘where ye shall live in a state of slavery and cap-  
‘tivity, because you have enslaved your brethren  
‘contrary to the expresse command of your God,  
‘*Jer. xxxiv.*’

THUS *Jeremiah*; and to the same purpose is  
*Ezekiel's* prophecy. And not only the event pro-  
ved them to be true Prophets, but their discourses  
were all along grounded upon good reason. We  
have heard what reasons *Jeremiah* gave, why *Je-  
rusalem* and the Temple should be burnt with fire,  
why *Judaea* should lie desolate seventy years, and  
the

the chief inhabitants of it be slaves and captives during that time. Let us now hear this doom confirmed by the mouth of the other witness, the Prophet *Ezekiel* here before us.

*EZEKIEL*'s method of instructing the people, was by representing to them those things in type and effigy, which God was about to bring upon them. We know that *Jeremiah* did not neglect this way of exhibiting the scenes of God's impending Judgments, but *Ezekiel* most abounded in it. Thus chap. iv. instead of discoursing to his incredulous brethren, about the siege which the *Chaldeans* would shortly lay to *Jerusalem*, he acts it, by dumb signs, as we say, but such signs as spoke even plainer than words. First, he draws a plan of the City, against which he raises a fort, casts up a mount, describes a camp and battering rams round about it. Then he lays him down before it, and looks wistfully upon it, for several days, and gets him a small stock of coarse bread and water, which he weighs and measures every day for his subsistence, to intimate the famine which should happen thro' scarcity of provisions during the siege.

IN the next Chapter, to denote the utter desolation of his Country, he takes a razor, and shaves off the hair of his head and beard. This hair he divides by weight into three equal parts: The first of which he burns in the midst of the City, or plan of *Jerusalem*, which he had drawn: Signifying thereby, that a third part of the inhabitants should perish by famine and pestilence. The second part of his hair he cuts to pieces with a knife, intimating that so many of the citizens should be slain with the sword, just after they had escaped out of the City. This was remarkably fulfilled in the slaughter of *Zedekiah*'s sons, and the rest of his retinue. The third part of his hair he scattered in the wind, in token of the dispersion of those  
who

who escaped pestilence, famine, and sword, how they should be scattered abroad in various Countries. But before he disposed of these last hairs, he took a few of them, and bound them up in the skirts of his cloaths, as much as to say, *A remnant shall be left in Judah*, and so there was, under *Gedaliah*. But then he presently took them out again, and cast them into the fire, to denote the conspiracy which *Ismael* should form against *Gedaliah*, which occasioned the utter ruin of that poor remainder of *Jews*, which *Nebuzaradan* left in their native Country; for part went down into *Egypt*, where they were all consumed, and the rest were entirely carried away to *Babylon*.

Thirdly, THE exiles at *Babylon* insulted *Ezekiel* with this proverb, or common saying, *The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth*: And what was the meaning of this? Why, they pretended that the time wherein the predictions of their captivity should have been fulfilled, was expired. They saw *Jerusalem* still inhabited, and under the Government of its own King; which made them repine at their own hard fortune, and think those who remained at *Jerusalem*, in a much better condition than themselves. St. *Jerome* says, some repented that they had followed the counsel of *Jeremiah*, and surrendered themselves to the *Babylonians*; whereas their own *Jerusalem*, the ruin of which he had prognosticated, was still in being. Therefore *Ezekiel*, to give them a lively vision of the downfall of their City, packed up his goods, as those use to do who remove from one place to another; and in the evening he digged thro' the wall of his house, and carried out his goods upon his back at the breach, in the presence of many of his people, who observed his motions; and he covered his face that he might not see the ground. And when they asked him what he meant by all this, he assured them



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that he was taking the Prince in *Jerusalem*. For, says he, this is the decree of God, that your King shall go forth of his palace in the twilight, bearing a burden upon his shoulder, and shall break through a wall of his buildings, that he may pass like a servant unobserved of the enemy: For which end he shall cover his face to disguise himself, so that he shall not see the ground with his eyes. Nevertheless, says God, I will cast my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare; and I will bring him to *Babylon*, to the Land of the *Chaldeans*, yet shall he not see it, tho' he shall die there.

HERE we may note with *Josephus*, *Ant. B. x. c. 9.* that *Zedekiah*, who had no mind to hearken to the prophetick warnings of his captivity, rejected both *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*, because the former had told him, xxxiv. 3. that his eyes should behold the eyes of the King of *Babylon*; whereas the other says here, that he shall not see *Babylon*, tho' he should die there. These two predictions *Zedekiah* took to be inconsistent, and so believed neither, nor any thing else that the authors said. But this shewed how willing he was to be an Infidel. For when *Ezekiel* said he should die in *Babylon* without seeing it, he might have concluded that this was very possible, he first losing his eyes before he was carried thither, as indeed it afterwards happened to him.

LET us come now to this xxiv. chap. of *Ezekiel*, whence my Text is taken, and see how the Prophet continues, by pertinent parables and representations, to shew the accomplishment of his predictions. At the beginning he affirms, that in the ninth year of *Zedekiah's* reign, the tenth month, the tenth day of the month, God revealed it to him, that upon this same day *Nebuchadnezzar* began the siege of *Jerusalem*. Now if we compare this

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this with the history of the siege, as it is related in *King. xix.* and *Jerem. lii.* we shall find that in all three places, the year, month, and day, of this occurrence, are exactly the same. This being revealed to *Ezekiel*, who was then in *Babylon*, above five hundred miles distant from *Jerusalem* at the very instant when it happened, was a great confirmation both to himself and all the people, that the Spirit of God spoke by him. And to convince gainsayers of this, was the great use which he was to make of it, as God directs at the end of this Chapter, saying, "When he that is escaped from the siege, shall come and tell thee and thy people how all things happened in it, as I have now revealed them, then thy mouth shall be opened, and thou shalt no more speak by dumb signs, but deliver thy predictions in plain words, which the people comparing with the event, and finding the exact agreement, shall be convinced that I the Lord have sent thee to say and do all these things."

At the same time God commands him to intimate the straits of the siege, and the manifold calamities which would attend it, by the parable of a pot boiling over a fire, in which were sodden the several joints and pieces of the choicest sheep of the flock. This pot, as he presently shows, denotes *Jerusalem*. The boiling of it, signifies the grievous judgments, that of fire especially, which would consume the City. By the good pieces and choice of the flock are meant, the King, Nobles, and principal men, who were shut upon it, being gathered together from all parts of *Judea*, with their money and portable goods, to escape being plundered in defenceless places by the irresistible forces of the *Chaldeans*. Of the same men he speaks when he says, *Take the meat out piece by piece, let no lot fall upon any of it, i.e.* The principal men shall

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be drawn out of the City, and slain by the *Chaldeans*; none of them shall escape by lot, as the custom of conquerors in other cases is, to cast lots what proportion of their captives shall be saved. There shall be no use of lots here; for they shall all be slain.

He proceeds: *Spice the pot well*, make it very savoury; for so shall the *Chaldeans* fall upon the inhabitants of *Jerusalem*, as men of a sharp appetite fall to a savoury well-dressed dish of meat. *Let the bones be burnt*; the fire shall be so fierce as to consume the very bones as well as the flesh, the brick and stone, silver and gold, iron and steel of the City, as well as the bodies of men, and their combustible goods. *Then set it empty upon the coals*: After an entire riddance of inhabitants, houses, and goods of all sorts, behold, nothing remains but the ashes and rubbish of a City, which once was, but now is no more.

W: T H this description of the calamities of their siege and captivity, God intermingles his reasons for inflicting them. *Jerusalem*, says he, *has been a bloody city*: This is her common character; so she had made her self, partly by the blood of the Prophets, partly by the blood of innocents offered in the sacrifices of her idols, partly in the violences and outrages which the higher sort committed upon the meaner people. *Secondly*, *She had wearied her self with lies*; with idols, which are commonly and justly styled lying vanities; with such wanton entertainments and vicious diversions as her idols were patrons of, and for the sake of whose patronage she chose to be their worshipper. She had wearied her self with lies in the more usual sense of the word, as it was the common practice of her citizens, in their words and actions, to cheat and defraud one another. *Jeremiah* and one or two more good men, were horri-  
bly



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ably defeated and wearied with these enemies of all righteousness. *Oh,* says that Prophet, chap. ix. *that I had but a cave in the wilderness, any Hermit's lodge, whither I might retire and sequester my self from my people; for they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. They bend their tongue like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon earth. Every brother utterly supplants: every neighbour walks with slanders. They have taught their tongue to speak lies, they weary themselves to commit iniquity. Their habitation is in the midst of deceit, thro' deceit they refuse to know the Lord.*

THIS villainous spirit of falshood and wrong they carried beyond their ordinary dealings, as high as their tribunals, which they filled with perjuries: And tho' they readily swore by the living God, yet trust them not, says Jeremiah, but rather be assured that they swear falsely, which they were so accustomed to do, that there was no execution of justice and judgment in this generation, as the same Prophet affirms.

Thirdly, A farther reason of Jerusalem's desolation, was the overflowing of her carnal lusts. *In thy filthiness is lewdness,* says God here by Ezekiel. To explain which, both our Prophets declaim often and aloud against the adulteries and whoredoms of this generation: Which words, tho' sometimes used metaphorically, to signify idolatries, yet are often limited in these prophecies, to the obvious and literal meaning. Indeed such lusts were the fruits of their idolatry; they were practised in obedience to the will and pleasure, the spirit and genius of their idols. *How shall I pardon thee for this?* says God to Jerusalem, Jer. v. *Thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no Gods.* Now observe the effects of this apostasy: *When I had fed them to the full, when they had peace and plenty, they then committed adul-*

tery, and assembled themselves by troops in their barbed  
houses. They were as fold houses in the morning, every  
one neighed after his neighbour's wife. Thus Jeremiah.  
Now hear how Ezekiel straitens Jerusalem of crimes  
of the like nature, chap. xxii. In thee have they dis-  
covered their fathers nakedness: in thee have they baw-  
bled her that was set apart. And one hath committed  
abomination with his neighbour's wife, and another  
bath lewdly defiled his daughter in law, and another  
in thee hath humbled his sister, his father's daughter.  
What need many words? The Prophets compare  
this City to Sodom, and the historical Books show,  
that they had the highest reason for this compa-  
rison.

THU'S far of Jerusalem's crying sins. In the  
next place observe the aggravations of them, as  
they are set forth in this xxiv chap. of Ezekiel. *I  
would have purged her,* says God, *but she refused to  
be purged. Her great scum (alluding to the meta-  
phor of a boiling pot) is not gone out of her.* How  
undeniable is this? How zealous was God to re-  
form Jerusalem, by the incessant calls and warn-  
ings of his Prophets? by the lighter corrections  
of sword, famine, and pestilence? light, in com-  
parison of this siege and captivity! by the exam-  
ple of her sister Samaria, the ten Tribes, who  
went into captivity before her, for the like pro-  
vocations! by plain denunciations, and gradual  
approaches of her own captivity. All which were  
so far from making sensible impressions upon her,  
that her scum, her grossest corruptions, remained  
to the last in the midst of her. *She set her blood,  
the innocent blood which she had shed, upon the  
top of a rock; she poured it not upon the ground; she  
covered it not with dust.* She was impudent and  
barefaced in her cruelties: So far from seeking to  
excuse them, that she committed them in defiance  
of one of her most known Laws, *that the land could*  
*not*

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*not be cleansed from blood, but by the blood of him that shed it.* And in concept of that precept *Levit. xvii. That the blood of any slain beast should be covered with dust;* in order to create the greater horror and aversion to the shedding of human blood.

For these provocations God threatens to take vengeance; and such a vengeance as should exceed all the tokens of sorrow to express the weight of it. This is here set forth by the Prophet's own case, whose wife was snatched from him by the stroke of a sudden death. A wife who was the desire of his eyes, the sweetest consolation of his banishment, the better half of his life. And yet for so grievous a loss God forbids him to shew any appearance of mourning, not to sigh or lament, not to shed a tear in publick, not to change his apparel, or shave his head, or go bare-foot, or refrain from his food: But to adorn his head, and wear his shoes, and eat and drink with as much freedom, as if no misfortune had happened to him.

This strange carriage of the Prophet moved his people to ask him what he meant by it. Whereupon he assured them, that he did it by God's express direction, who had commanded him to tell them upon this occasion, in his name and words.

Behold, I will profane my Sanctuary, the excellency of your strength: That Temple wherein you placed your glory, and thought my residence, there your greatest protection, will I give up into the hands of the Heathen, and they shall profane and destroy it. And the desire of your eyes, that which your soul pitieth, your wives and children, shall fall by the sword. Under which heavy judgments, ye shall do as I have done: You shall not change your dress or diet; you shall not make any outward mourning; you shall be too much in the power of your enemies,



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and too much astonished and confounded, to observe any forms; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one towards another: Ye shall waste with an inward grief, and secretly bewail your calamities.

AND thus I have shown, in various instances, how *Ezekiel* was a sign to the house of *Israel*, as declared in my Text, and how he described, by sensible representations, the miseries which God was about to bring upon them.

THAT his predictions were fully accomplished, we learn from the conclusion of the Books of *Kings* and *Chronicles*; from the xxxix and li Chapters of *Jeremiah*; but most particularly from the *Lamentations* of that Prophet, who was an eye-witness of the desolations of his Country, and captivity of his People. And in taking a view of the ruins which he had foreseen in his prophetick Visions, he says a thing which much confirms what I have just now quoted from *Ezekiel*, *Lamen. ii. 13.* *What thing shall I take to witness for thee? what thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Sion? for thy breach is great like the sea: who can heal thee?* This was an apt similitude, and suited both their religious and civil state. The banks of the sea, which are made to keep it from overflowing any Country, must be narrowly watcht, and always repaired in due season: For if the sea once makes a breach in them, it quickly gets such a head, as passes the art and power of man to restrain it. Such a sea was the atheism and immorality which broke in upon *Jerusalem*. Our two Prophets diligently watcht this sea, and cried out often for help, when they saw the banks weakened and giving way. But those who had these banks, I mean the Laws of God, in charge to maintain them, would

would not hear the outcry for help. Instead of that, they lent their own hands to open the breach, till the stream swelled to a deluge, so that no good Laws could stand before it, but the waves of impiety rode triumphant over them all. *And* prophets, as *Jeremiah* goes on to lament, *have seen vain and foolish things for thee; they have not covered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity.* Why so? could not *Jerusalem* stand firm and flourish in her own ways? So indeed these false Prophets told her; but the sacred Oracles, from the beginning of the Law to the end of the Prophets, assured her, that a deluge of corrupt manners would in time fill her with a deluge of calamities and judgments.

WHAT can be more natural, more reasonable, than that which God resolves to do in this xxiv of *Ezekiel*. 'Because, says he, *Jerusalem* will needs place the blood which she hath shed, upon the top of a rock; I also will place it there, that it shall not be covered: i. e. I will make her punishment as notorious as her sins. She hath defiled my Temple with idols, and turned her houses into meer brothels of lewdness; and she hath refused to purge them with such a reformation as I have demanded: Therefore now I will purge them with fire, and leave them a monument of my fury.'

How long did God wait? how often did he call, *Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee: lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.* But she refused to be instructed, and God's soul did depart from her. Let us hear, and fear, and take better impressions from such words of exhortation, that they may perswade us to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts from the defilement of those sins which abound among us, which render us odious in the eyes of God, and

and make a way for his fiery indignation to issue  
 out upon us. Let us speedily embrace the over-  
 tures of our peace, while the door of mercy stands  
 open to us, turning without delay from our re-  
 bellious ways, and doing those things which are  
 well-pleasing to God, that so we may be recon-  
 ciled to him, and rejoice in the light of his coun-  
 tenance, and finally may obtain of him the salva-  
 tion of our souls and bodies, thro' the merits of  
*Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom &c.*





# SERMON XLIV.

On the Nineteenth Sunday after TRINITY.

DANIEL. VI. 10.

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforatime.

**T**HE Prophet *Isaiah*, Chap. xxxix. had told *Hozekiah*, that the days were coming, when some of his posterity should be servants and chamberlains in the palace of the King of *Babylon*. Which prophecy may be said to have had its accomplishment in *Daniel*, if indeed he was of the Seed Royal, as Commentators conclude he was from this Book, which bears his name, and of which he was the author. In the beginning of which he informs us, that he was carryed away captive from *Jerusalem*, to *Babylon*, in the third year of the reign of *Jehoiakim* King of *Judah*. And he continued in the service of the Kings of *Babylon* and their Successors,

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fort, the whole of his remaining life, which was very long: For he was about nineteen or twenty years old at the beginning of the captivity, and he lived to see the restoration of his People by *Cyrus*: So that he must be ninety or upwards, when he died.

IN this state of life *Daniel* attained to a most illustrious and honourable character: Particularly he signalized himself by an eminent piety, wisdom, spirit of prophecy, and a capacity fit for the highest station of civil Government.

I. *DANIEL* was a person of heroick piety, which had plainly the ascendant over all his sensual passions and appetites. He was brought a tender youth to *Babylon*, and *Nebuchadnezzar* had ordered that he should eat and drink of the provisions of the royal Table: Which *Daniel* was so far from being pleased with, that he carefully avoided them. For he considered, that those provisions often consisted of such things as were forbidden him by the Law of his God: And besides, they were by certain libations and ceremonies first offered to Idols, and their blessing was invoked upon them: So that *Daniel* could not partake of them without entering into a kind of communion with those idols, which he was resolved to avoid at any rate.

To this end he applied to the Steward, to change his royal allowance of meat and wine into a diet of pulse and water. The Steward was afraid lest this diet should make *Daniel* look so thin and pale, that the King would discover it, and punish him with the loss of his head, for disobeying his orders. Whereupon *Daniel* begged of him, and obtained his leave, to try this way of living for ten days; at the end of which he appeared fresher and fatter than those Children which had their daily portion from the King's Table.

THIS

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be T<sup>h</sup>is proves what I asserted, that Daniel's piety was above his sensual appetites; and it likewise shows the strength of his faith in the power and goodness of God, that he could make the meanest fare as nourishing as the best; and the success answered his expectation.

AGAIN, when *Nebuchadnezzar* wanted to recover the memory of a dream which he had forgotten; and after an ineffectual tryal of all his Astrologers and Diviners, *Daniel* alone could help him to the account of it, with the interpretation, hear and admire his piety when he was but twenty two years old. *The secret*, says he, *which the King demands is not to be discovered by any art or wisdom of men: Now but the God of Heaven is able to reveal it. And he hath revealed it to me, not for any wisdom that I have more than other men; but for their sakes who should make known the interpretation, and that the King might know the thoughts of his own heart.*

BUT the most eminent instance of *Daniel's* piety, is that which we have here before us in the words of my Text; That when he knew there was a Law enacted by the King and his Senators, that any man who should say his prayers in thirty days from that time, should most certainly be thrown into a den of hungry Lions, he despised this Law as impious and absurd, and did not abate one tittle of his devotions for fear of it: But went freely and without concealment to his Oratory three times a-day, and opening his windows towards *Jerusalem*, kneeled down upon his knees, and performed his devotions of prayer and thanksgiving, just as he had been used to do at other times. This was serving God with his life and fortunes indeed; both which he forfeited to the Law by this service, and had certainly lost them,



them, I had not (God appeared for him, and saved him by a miraculous deliverance.

FINALLY, let us hear what a testimony God himself gives of the piety of *Daniel*, by the Prophet *Ezekiel* who lived at the same time; Chap. xiv. *Tho', says he, Noah, Daniel, and Job lived all together in this Land, yet would I lay it desolate.* Which is as much as to say, that nothing was so likely to have prevailed with God, as the united prayers of these three Men. A most high and honourable commendation of *Daniel's* piety.

II. *DANIEL'S* wisdom was so incomparably great, that it was grown into a Proverb, even when he was but thirty six years old. For thus we read in the same Prophet, *Ezek. Chap. xxviii. Behold, thou art wiser, or thinkest thy self wiser, than Daniel; so that no secret can be hid from thee.* This is spoken to *Esbaal* King of Tyre, as a reproof of the high conceit which he had of himself. And it shews at the same time, that *Daniel's* wisdom was so celebrated all over the East, that for any one to be esteemed comparable to him herein, was as much as to say, that he was equal to the wisest of men.

WE have heard before how *Daniel* revealed and interpreted *Nebuchadnezzar's* dream, which none of the wise men of *Babylon* could find out; and how modestly he acknowledged that he had not discovered the secret by any wisdom that he had of his own superior to that of other men; but that it was revealed to him by the special favour and goodness of the God of Heaven. This modesty was not the least part of his wisdom. Indeed no man ever deserved the character of a wise, or ever maintained it long, who was wise in his own conceit, perswaded of his own sufficiency, destitute of that humility, and fear of God,

God, and sense of the necessity of his assistance, which is the foundation of all sound wisdom. Daniel, by arrogating nothing to himself, but ascribing all his knowledge to the Divine Bounty, was led by this principle to pray unto God for the illumination of his Holy Spirit, to show him his way in all difficult cases, to instruct him in things which were past man's understanding. And for every such instruction he never failed to bless and glorify God, to confess him before Kings and Princes; insomuch that *Nebuchadnezzar*, tho' an incorrigible idolater, and a man of Luciferian pride, yet frankly declared, *Of a truth your God is a God of Gods, and a Lord of Kings, and a revealer of secrets*; and he praised, extolled, and honoured this King of Heaven, confessing that all his works were truth, and his ways judgment, and that he was able to abase all those who proudly exalted themselves. And tho' he used violence with some, to compel them to worship his graven Image, yet it does not appear that he ever offered to put such a force upon *Daniel*; it is much more probable, that he left him entirely free in the exercise of his religion.

HOWEVER, it was a great part of *Daniel's* wisdom, and indeed the wisest thing that he could do, to adhere to the worship of his God, against all the dangers which were thrown in his way, to deter him from it. Thus, at his first coming to *Babylon*, he took a wise resolution, and it proved the foundation of his happiness there, that he would not defile himself with the portion of the King's meat, nor with the wine which he drank, for the reasons before mentioned. By keeping himself thus undefiled, his heart became the Temple of the Holy Spirit, which enlightened him so, that he had clear visions of God, and was, as I may say, admitted to his counsels, and fore-

foreſaw what he was about to do; which favours had never been vouchſafed him, if he had not preſerved a pure heart; for none but the pure in heart can thus ſee God.

THUS again, in his advanced age, when he was ſeventy five years old, and had outlived *Nebuchadnezzar* and all his race, and had a penalty ſet upon him under a new King, that he ſhould die a horrid death, if he was known to ſay his prayers in thirty days, he readily ſaw and choſe the wiſeſt courſe, which was, to continue firm in his duty to God, and truſt him with the iſſue. This was all contrary to the rules of human policy, ſo far as they are known to us at this day. A man who would have acted *Daniel's* part amongſt us, would have been counted ill-mannered, fool-hardy, and even deſerving of the threatened puniſhment, if he had run into the ſnare of this Law, when there was ſuch an eaſie way to avoid it. For what did it require of him? not the change of his religion, but only a ſuſpenſion of the publick exerciſe of it for thirty days: After which he might lawfully return to it again; and in the mean time he might ſay his prayers to himſelf, and liſt up his heart to God in ſecret, without giving any offence, or incurring any penalty at all. This is the language of the men amongſt us, who are eſteemed for good ſenſe and reaſon, and there is certainly a vaſt majority of them in our preſent World. I dare not ſay that I believe *Daniel* had a chappel in his houſe, where his Domestiicks, who were of his own religion, worſhipped God along with him. I dare not ground any thing upon this conjecture, becauſe I find none but himſelf called to an account for the breach of the Law. However, this is plain from the Text, that he had a room in his houſe, wherein he uſually worſhipped God; and if others of his ſervants



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servants or dependants met here before, 'tis likely they now forbore, upon the account of this Law made against it. But *Daniel* went into this room three times a-day, as before, and opened his windows, and said his prayers publickly enough to be taken notice of. He had no mind to conceal himself, because he resolved by his practice to glorifie his God, to declare that he regarded him above all things, and to let those who had made this Law, understand, that in his opinion they had done a very ill thing.

Now this, I say, was wisdom in *Daniel*, that he did not discontinue the exercise of his religion, as if he were still to chuse it, or to learn the importance of it; as if he were halting between two masters, and considering to which side it were best for him to incline. That he did not offer any pitiful petition for licence to enjoy the liberty of his conscience; for this had been to betray the cause of God, and to submit it to the pleasure of God's Enemies, whether his servants should worship him. I do not say that this is a constancy which men of all religions should be encouraged to glory in: For then the worshippers of *Baal* should be as inflexible as the servants of the God of *Israel*. But according to the appeal of *Elijah* and other Prophets, let *Baal* plead for himself, and give as good proofs of his Divinity as had been given by the God of *Israel*. *Daniel* knew his God as a Prophet, and he was well acquainted with his dispensations towards his own People, and particularly with that fresh instance of his mercy towards three of his companions in captivity, who had been thrown into a fiery furnace for their adherence to their God. Their answer and their success were a clear direction to any good man how to acquit himself in the like case. For when *Nebuchadnezzar* bid them wor-

ship his Idol, and shewed them the burning furnace which was prepared for them, if they refused; O *Nebuchadnezzar*, said they, *we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from this burning furnace, and he will deliver us: But if not, be it known to thee, O King, that we will not serve thy Gods, nor worship thy golden Image which thou hast set up.*

WE cannot doubt but that *Daniel*, upon the like occasion, reasoned with himself exactly after the same manner. 'I have nothing at all to say to this Law, but to disregard it in my practice; and go on to pray to my God, and honour him as I have ever done. I have served him so many years, in which I have seen his goodness to others, and experienced it towards myself in a long series of favours from Kings and Princes; I have held communion with him by many supernatural visions and revelations.' And shall I now be separated from him by the terror of a Den of Lions? He who carried my brethren thro' the fire untouched, can as easily deliver me from the rage of these brutes. But suppose they should devour me, can they destroy and make a full end of me? I know that the beloved of God, tho' for a while they sleep in the dust, shall awake again, and rise to everlasting life: And they who are so wise as to glorifie God, by submitting to die for the honour of his name, shall shine hereafter with a superior brightness, as the Stars for ever and ever. So that whatever I lose now for God's sake, shall be restored to me above a hundred-fold in a blessed station of God's heavenly Kingdom.' Such sort of reasoning, and much stronger than I can imagine, was *Daniel* master of, to confirm him in his religion against the fears of death. And thus much of his Wisdom.

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III. HE had an excellent capacity for the management of civil affairs in the highest station of Government; which indeed was the real occasion, and religion only the pretence, why he was called in question for his life: For his superior abilities stirred up the envy of such Governours as were subordinate to him, to lay this plot for him, which they knew would ensnare him, because they were sure he would not desist, no not for a day, from praying to his God.

To see the bottom of this contrivance, we must look back to the foregoing Chapter. There we find *Belshazzar* King of *Babylon* in a great consternation at the appearance of some unintelligible writing, which was presented to him in a supernatural way upon a wall that was over-against him as he sat at a Banquet.

THIS *Belshazzar* is called *Nebuchadnezzar's* Son, by a mode of speech common in the Eastern Languages: But he was indeed his Grandson; for the succession of that royal Family ran thus. Next to *Nebuchadnezzar* succeeded his Son *Evil-merodach*, who reigned a little above two years, and then was murdered by *Neriglissor* his Brother-in-Law who had married his Sister. *Neriglissor*, having reigned four years, fell in battel fighting for his dominions against *Cyrus* King of *Persia*; and was succeeded by his Son *Laborosarchod*, who in nine months time so provoked his people with his intolerable manners, that they slew him, and set up the heir of the right line, this *Belshazzar*, who was Grandson to *Nebuchadnezzar* by his Son *Evil-merodach* above mentioned.

*BELSHAZZAR*, when he had reigned about seventeen years, made a great entertainment for his wives, concubines, princes, and a thousand of his great officers and noblemen. Upon which occasion he brought out the vessels of gold



gold and silver, which his Grandfather had taken out of the Temple at *Jerusalem*. In these they drank wine, and offered libations to their Idols: Which so highly offended God, that he spoiled their Banquet by a prodigy. He caused the fingers of a hand to appear to *Belsazzar*, and to write upon the wall over-against him, two or three lines in such characters as he could not understand.

THIS astonished the King and his whole company, and made him cry aloud for his astrologers and learned men to come and read the writing. They came and viewed it, but could make nothing of it, because, as 'tis reasonably supposed, it was writ in the old *Hebrew*, now called the *Samaritan* Alphabet, which was quite different from the *Chaldee*, tho' this last is now the common Alphabet for the *Hebrew* tongue.

THIS difficulty encreased the King's disorder; to assuage which Queen *Nitocris* his mother came in, and for an Interpreter recommended *Daniel* to him, whom either he could not think of for the confusion he was in, or else being negligent in matters of government, knew little of him. *Daniel* came in, and after he had piously and affectionately rebuked the King for not learning to fear God by the judgments which he knew had befallen his Grandfather *Nebuchadnezzar*, he read the writing, and told the meaning of it, which was this, *That God had put an end to his reign, and given his Kingdom to the Medes and Persians*.

FOR this service *Daniel* was immediately rewarded with a suit of royal apparel, and proclaimed the third ruler in the Kingdom. And his interpretation was quickly verified; for in that same night the forces of *Cyaxares* the *Mede* and *Cyrus* the *Persian*, which had long besieged *Babylon*, took it by stratagem, and put the King and many of the inhabitants to the sword. THE

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THE stratagem was this. *Cyrus* had long tryed and found that he could make no advance by battering the walls of the city; for they were so high and thick, that they were one of the wonders of the World for their strength. Considering therefore that the River *Euphrates* ran thro' *Babylon*, he contrived to divert the water of it, and to render it fordable; so that his soldiers might pass thro' the channel of it into the city. Accordingly he caused sluices and drains to be dug in the banks of it; but not to be opened till a certain night when he was informed an anniversary festival would be celebrated all over the city. This is *Belsbazzar's* feast which we read of in *Daniel*. When that night came, he caused the sluices to be suddenly opened, and by midnight the stream of the river was so shallow, that his men went into the channel, and thro' it into the city, which they easily took, the inhabitants keeping no guard, and disabled by their feasting and free living to make any considerable resistance.

CYRUS, who had the Empire of *Persia*, and other large dominions to govern, gave the Kingdom of *Babylon* to *Darius* the *Mede*, whom *Xenophon* and others call *Cyaxares*. He was uncle to *Cyrus* by the mother's side, and his Father-in-law by marriage; for *Cyrus* married his daughter.

DARIUS was about sixty two years old, when he began to reign in *Babylon*, and his reign there was but short; some say not above two years. After his decease, *Cyrus* took the government of *Babylon* upon himself. And so it fell to him to be the restorer of *Israel* from their captivity, as it had been foretold by the Prophets, and as the Records of the Sacred History affirm.

PRESENTLY after *Darius* came to the Throne, he constituted a hundred and twenty Lords to be Sub-governours of his Kingdom: Over whom he

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*appointed three presidents, of which Daniel was the first, because an excellent spirit was found in him, a spirit of wisdom and prudence, a spirit of piety and zeal, a spirit of providence and foresight of things to come. For these his great Talents and Endowments the King thought to have made him sole President over all his Kingdom: To prevent this, the other Presidents and Sub-governours combined against Daniel, and sought to find a flaw in the administration of his office. But finding nothing of this kind to lay to his charge, they throw a stumbling-block in the way of his religion, and prepare a den of Lions to receive him when he fell.*

*DARIUS* signed their Decree, but he was over-reached in it. If he had seen their design, he would not have passed it, for he was *Daniel's* sincere friend. And when he heard him accused for the breach of this Law, he was very angry at himself for enacting it, and laboured with all his might to find out a way how he might deliver him from the penalty of it. But that being out of his power (for Kings could not dispense with the Laws of the *Medes* and *Persians*) he called him, and spoke comfortably to him, bidding him not doubt but that his God would deliver him. And when he was put into the den, the King fasted and prayed for him all that night; and rising early in the morning he went to him with all speed, and finding that no harm had been done to him, he congratulated him with the greatest joy.

*HIS* accusers, on the contrary, were sorry for his escape. *Josephus* writes how they alledged before the King, that the reason why the Lions spared him was, because they had been well fed but just before. Hereupon *Darius* caused them to be fed with as much flesh as they would eat in his presence; and then commanded *Daniel's* accusers



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fers to be thrown in among them, to make the experiment of their own allegation, and see whether the Lions would touch them or not, when they were full. But the Lions fell upon the accusers with such fury, that they broke all their bones before they came to the ground.

*DANIEL* being thus delivered, and his adversaries destroyed, the King saw the hand of God in this affair so evidently, that he wrote a Decree, and sent it throughout his Dominions, charging all his Subjects *to fear and reverence this God, the living God, steadfast for ever and ever, whose Kingdom shall never be destroyed, whose dominion shall endure unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth.*

LET us go, and do likewise: Let us imitate the piety of *Daniel*, and obey this Decree of *Darius*. *Daniel's* prayers and praises to God were not to be silenced by any threatnings. He confessed and magnified him in the face of those men, who had passed a Law that he should die for it. We profess to believe in the same God, and have no such Law to deter us from his worship, but full liberty, frequent invitations, open Churches for us to come and fall down and kneel before the Lord our maker.

*DANIEL* gloried in God as his benefactor and protector: And will any of us disown him in these capacities? There is no man who looks back upon the course of his life, but he must see a great many providential deliverances which have been vouchsafed him, and which would well deserve to be called Miracles, if they were not wrought every day and hour, either for us or about us. And infinite calamities of life would be prevented, did men but recommend themselves by regular and devout prayers to the merciful protection of Almighty God. For by their prayers they would

be delivered from the Temptations of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil; they would be rescued, at least, from the Dominion of such temptations, from an habitual slavery to those sinful lusts and passions which are seen every day to hurry men in to the destruction of soul, body, and estate.

By their prayers they might obtain those graces, which, as we have heard, were eminent in *Daniel*; I mean the blessings of a sound mind, piety, wisdom, faith in God, the light of his Spirit, the pleasures of communion with him. The Scriptures of our New Testament assure us, that we may have all these things for asking, if we will but ask for them, not in a slight, unsteady way, but with a regular devotion and constancy in prayer.

SURELY it is not in vain that the Scripture speaks so much of the graces of the Holy Spirit. Such graces are to be had, and we might wonderfully improve all the faculties of our Souls by them, if we would but heartily apply to God for them. *Daniel* and other great men obtained them, and became what they were by such application.

BUT they prayed and sang praises to God three times a-day; such was the practice of the Church in their times. Whereas very few Christians do this so often as three times a week; I mean in publick; and I am afraid, those who neglect the publick, are far from being diligent and zealous in their private prayers.

By such neglects as these, men bereave themselves of the benefit of God's favour and protection, they lose the consolations of his Holy Spirit, they are strangers to the hopes of his heavenly Kingdom, and are destitute of that true faith and courage which should support them under all dispensations, and which can only be grounded on the love of God. They cast themselves into far  
worse

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worse circumstances than the Lions den, out of which praying *Daniel* was safely delivered : But they, by neglecting their prayers, sink themselves into the dungeon of a dark mind, which is alienated from God, and consequently cut off from the fountain of light ; and exposed to all the storms and tempests of disorderly passions : They are in this World as in a wilderness, and become a prey to that spiritual Lion who is always ready to devour them, and are hastening to fall and be swallowed up in that bottomless pit, from which there is no redemption.

WHAT shall I say more ? The time is but short, when we shall be at the end of our race : And when we come there, whether our lot shall be happiness or misery, we shall then be convinced that every moment spent in serious prayer, is time laid out to the very best advantage, because it brings us forward, tho' perhaps by unperceivable degrees, yet it certainly brings us forward to the attainment of that heavenly treasure which we must thus labour for. Let it suffice that our labour shall not be in vain in him who hath said, *Ask, and ye shall have ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened to you.* Let us perform the command, and we shall enjoy the promised blessings, thro' his goodness who is both able and willing to save us, Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom  
Ec.



SERMON





# SERMON XLV.

*On the Twentieth Sunday after TRINITY.*



MICAH vi. 9.

*The Lord's voice cryeth unto the city, and  
the man of wisdom shall see thy name:  
Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.*

**F**ROM the beginning of this prophecy we learn, that the author of it was a native of the Kingdom of *Judah*; for *Morestha* or *Marefa*, whence he is denominated a *Morasthite*, was a Town of that Kingdom, about sixteen miles westward of *Jerusalem*. He prophesied in the days of *Jotham*, *Abaz*, and *Hezekiah*, Kings of *Judah*, and was cotemporary with the Prophet *Isaiab*, with whom he agrees exactly in the matter of his prophecy, in representing the manners of his people, in warning them of God's visitations which were coming upon them; and particularly that they should be carried away captive to *Babylon*; which is a notable demonstration of the truth of his prophecy: For this was one hundred and thirty years at least before that captivity was accomplished, and

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and above one hundred before any steps were taken towards it. And with these heavy tidings he intermixes many gracious promises of God concerning the restoration of the *Jerus*, the calling of the *Gentiles*, and the coming of the *Messiah*, of whom he delivers that remarkable prediction, which we find quoted from him, *Matth. ii.* that *Bethlehem* should be the place of Christ's Nativity.

THERE is a noble testimony of the Prophet *Micah* recorded *Jerem. xxvi.* which was brought in upon this occasion. *Jeremiah* standing in the court of the Lord's house, and loudly denouncing God's judgments upon it, in the presence of the Priests, Prophets, and a very great assembly of People, they were so highly offended at him for it, that they told him, he should surely die. The news of this disturbance quickly reached the royal palace, and caused several of the Nobility and principal men to go up to the Temple. When they came there, and had heard both sides, they rescued *Jeremiah* from the death that was threatned him, by this argument: '*Micah the Morasthite*, said they, prophesied in the days of *Hezekiah* King of *Judah*, and spake to all the people, saying, 'Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, *Sion* shall be plowed like a field, and *Jerusalem* shall become heaps, and the mountains of the house, as the high places of a forest. Did *Hezekiah* offer to put him to death for this? Did he not rather fear the Lord, and seek him upon this warning? So that the Lord repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against *Judah*.' The words here referred to, are *Micah iii. 12.*

BUT my Text will lead us to treat of many more passages of this Prophet, which will abundantly prove that he was inspired by the same Spirit which spoke by *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah*, and the rest of God's messengers, sent upon the like errand to his people.

THE

*THE Lord's voice, says he, cryeth unto the city, or rather, unto the cities; for Micah tells us his vision concerned both Samaria and Jerusalem. Against these there is a cry both of sins and of punishments. First of sins. The ground and reason of God's visitation is laid down in general, thus. For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel: what is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem? The meaning is this, that these great Cities, Samaria and Jerusalem, had corrupted the two Kingdoms of which they were the respective heads, Samaria of Israel, Jerusalem of Judah. And this, I believe, is the case of most Kingdoms, that they are much influenced by the spirit and genius of their head Cities. For there is the general residence of the King, his Courtiers, his Senate and great Officers. There are commonly to be found the great oracles of Religion and the Laws. There the Temples and Churches and Schools of education are generally more numerous than in other places. On the other hand, atheism and immorality, when they meet with a superior patronage, are no where so predominant as in great Cities: Because there are the greatest riches, the greatest concourse of all sorts of people, the most houses of entertainment, and places convenient for sensual pleasures and vitious diversions.*

*AND there are several ways of propagating the manners of such a Metropolis, whether good or evil, to all its inferior Cities and Towns; partly by the multitude of people who are always coming and going; partly by common fame; and very much by such letters and books as are issued out from such a City: For these declare very fully and pathetically the prevailing sentiments of the head to all the members. So that if the Metropolis be a harlot, an enemy of God, a sink of iniquity,*  
*she*



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She quickly proclaims her blasphemies and corruptions, not only over her own, but over many of her neighbouring Kingdoms; and becomes the common parent of innumerable sons and daughters of impiety.

SUCH kind of parents were *Samaria* and *Jerusalem*. They were two fountains of corruption which infected all the Countries round about them. The transgression of *Samaria* were *Baal* and the golden Calves; the transgression of *Jerusalem* were her high places, where idolatries were practised. Thus the Prophet lays his general charge; he will come to particulars presently. But he begins with religious abuses, because they are the spring and root of all other wickedness.

WHEN we hear the charge of idolatry, we must not think that these Cities filled themselves with Idols, only for the sake of so many images, altars, sacrifices, and other superstitious ceremonies. This had been to encrease the trouble and expences of Religion, which they had no delight in. But their idolatrous worship consisted much in the gratification of their carnal lusts and passions. Their groves and high places were a kind of *Masquerades* where they wallowed in sensualities. Their Idols were the patrons of their profligate living, as *Bacchus*, *Venus*, and *Mercury* were of intemperance, uncleanness, lying, stealing, and fraudulent dealings among the *Greeks* and *Romans*. They were the same of old in the eastern Countries, only under different names. And they had the same influence upon their worshippers, as we shall hear presently. I observe now, that the Prophet takes a good method in his reproofs, to begin with these Cities, as being the heads and leaders of their respective Kingdoms; and with the state of Religion in them, as having the greatest influence upon the manners of the people. *The Lord's voice cryeth against the city's idolatry.*

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Secondly, His voice cries against their violence and oppression. 'Wo unto them that devise iniquity upon their beds: When the morning is light, they put it in practice. They covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away; so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage. Even of late, my people is risen up as an enemy: Ye pull off the robe with the garment, from them that pass by securely, as men averse from war.' This puts me in mind of some passages in the *Roman History*, which assure us, that under the reigns of their tyrannical Emperors, especially under *Commodus*, who was a second *Nero*, many men were put to death for no other reason, but because they had great estates, which, upon their being executed, escheated to the Emperor's treasury. And *Herodian* writes, that when the said *Commodus* was dead, and was succeeded by *Pertinax*, a man endued with all the virtues which the other wanted, by which he endeared himself to his people, and grew formidable to his enemies; as soon as he commanded the soldiers which were his standing forces, *not to offer any rudeness to the people, nor to affront any person that passed by*, they conspired against him and killed him in a mutiny, before he had reigned three months, being impatient for a return of the same tyranny which they had exercised under *Commodus*, when they debauched, and committed what spoil and violence they pleased without controul.

SUCH executions of rich men for their estates, and such military outrages, we often meet with in the *Turkish History*. And it seems they prevailed of old in the *Jewish Government*. For this must be *Micah's* meaning, when he says, 'they oppress a man and his family for the sake of his fields and houses; they pull off the garments of passengers who are unarmed, and not prepared for war.'

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THE Prophet proceeds with his charge of violent dealing: *The women of my people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children have ye taken away my glory for ever.* When these oppressors had cut off the master of a family, they turned his helpless widow and children out of doors, and reduced them to such a state of beggary and slavery, that they were deprived of all good education; and the honour of being God's children, and members of his Church, appeared in them no more. Their oppressors were the murderers both of their bodies and souls.

ANOTHER branch of oppression he charges upon their Governors, chap. iii. and that is, their cruel exactions of duties from the people in their trades and their labours, so that they had made it impossible for them to live with any comfort. *Hear, says he, ye heads of Jacob, and princes of Israel: is it not for you to know judgment?* Men of their birth and station were more especially bound to know and practise the Law of God, which enjoined them to treat the inferior people as their brethren, to seek their welfare, to give them the fruits of their labours, to render to every man his due, a living price for his goods, and just wages for his work. *But you, says he, are a set of men who hate the good, and love the evil, who pluck off the skin, and tear the flesh from the bone. Ye eat the flesh of my people, ye flay their skin from off them; ye break their bones and chop them in pieces as for the pot, as flesh for the caldron.* What words can more exquisitely set forth a killing oppression? He speaks in allusion to a shepherd and his flock. *'Ye are not content, says he, with the fleece and the milk, but ye devour the whole, the skin, the flesh and the bones, by your grievous impositions which you lay upon the poor people, and which you consume in the pampering of your own*



own pride, luxury, and vanity.' Thus *the Lord's voice cries against the oppression of the city.*

Thirdly, He cries against their bribery and corruption. *Hear again, I pray you, ye heads of Jacob, and princes of Israel, who abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. They build up Sion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests teach for hire, and the prophets divine for money.* We see the love of money swayed and governed all the governing men both in Church and State. And when that was the spring of all business, how wretched must be the administration? Who could expect good Laws from such corrupt Legislators? Or a fair execution of those that were good, from such Judges? Or to hear the genuine word of God from Prophets and Priests who sought money above all things? That this is their true character, is confirmed by the Prophet *Isaiah*, who, as I noted before, lived in the same generation, chap. i. *How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment, righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come before them. And why not? but because they had no money to carry on their suit; which was therefore either wholly neglected, or if it was brought into court, it was easily run down by a rich adversary, who had money enough to fee and bribe and make friends against them. This is the reason why Micah complains that Sion was built with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity, because their Princes by oppression, their Judges by bribes, their Prophets and Priests for rewards, and all to raise fine houses, and purchase large estates, destroyed the estates, and bodies and souls of the people. Thus the Lord*  
cries

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cries against the city for their bribery, and corruption of all Laws sacred and civil.

Fourthly, He cries against the city for her witchcrafts and soothsayers, chap. v. 12. No Nation was ever more addicted to the several sorts of divination than the *Jews*, both of ancient and modern times. We find a great many remarks and complaints of this kind in the writings of the Prophets. This is certainly one reason why the *Jews* were so fond of Idols, because by the help of evil spirits who spoke thro' them, they exercised sorceries and soothsaying. Which they practised however, long after they were weaned from their Idols. Thus we read *Acts* xix. that when certain vagabond *Jews*, who were exorcists, or conjurers, took upon them to cast out evil spirits for money, by invoking the name of our blessed Lord, the demoniack fell upon them, and wounded them, and put them to flight: Which so affected many more who used the like unlawful arts, that they embraced Christianity, and brought their magical Books together, and burnt them in a heap, to the value of fifty thousand pieces of silver.

THEIR Talmud, which was written long since the beginnings of Christianity, takes notice that they commonly used amulets and charms against diseases and accidents; that most of the women in *Israel* were guilty of sorceries; that eighty of them were executed at *Ascalon* in one day for those crimes; and one of their *Rabbies* writes, that there was a chamber in the very Temple, built by a Magician; which, whether true or false, shews their own opinion of the prevalence of magick in several ages among them.

Now let us hear what the Lord says of such practices, by the cotemporary Prophet, *Isaiah* viii. 19. When, says he, they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards

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*that peep and that mutter; should not a people seek unto their God? What a lamentable state was this, that under such a Law, such a Covenant, when there was so much light of God's word, and such Prophets as Isaiab and Micah, yet these instruments of Satan should be so numerous, and the people should so commonly have recourse to them, as from this Text we may justly conclude. For this reason, as I take it, is Micah's memento a little before my Text. Remember, O my people, what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beer answered him: that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord. Remember what mischiefs these powers of hell have meditated against you, and how gracious God has been in restraining them; and be more just to your selves and to your God, than to seek unto them in any difficulty. Thus the Lord's voice cryeth against witchcrafts.*

*Fifthly, HE cries out against frauds in commerce and dealing. To prevent which God had enacted very strict Laws. Levit. xix. 35, 36. 'Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in mete-yard, in weight or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin shall ye have. Deut. xxv. 13, &c. Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure: That thy days may be lengthened in the Land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God.'*

*This iniquity in buying and selling was much spoken against by the royal Preacher, and other wise men and Prophets. 'And are there yet, says God here by the Prophet Micah, after all my Laws and*



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‘ and threatnings to make you true and just in your  
‘ dealings, are there yet the treasures of wicked-  
‘ ness in the house of the wicked, and the scant  
‘ measure that is abominable? Shall I count them  
‘ pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag  
‘ of deceitful weights?’ This was one of the abo-  
minations which defiled their Land, and cast them  
out of it.’

*Lastly*, He cryeth out against the treachery of  
friends, and the want of mutual affection in the  
nearest relations. ‘ Trust ye not in a friend, put  
‘ no confidence in a guide: Keep the doors of thy  
‘ mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For  
‘ the son dishonoureth the father: the daughter  
‘ riseth up against her mother: the daughter-in-  
‘ law against her mother-in-law; a man’s enemies  
‘ are the men of his own house.’

SUCH were the *Jews* when they were drawn  
down to the dregs, a little before they were car-  
ried to *Babylon*; and such they were again at the  
time of their last captivity, when they became a  
prey to the *Romans*, as we learn from our Lord,  
who applies this last verse to them, *Matth. x.*

HITHERTO we have heard the voice of the  
Lord crying against the sins of his people: Now  
let us hear the same voice declaring what judg-  
ments were coming upon them for the punishment  
of such sins, as they are set forth in this prophecy  
of *Micah*.

THE first woe denounced, is the ruin of *Sa-  
maria*. *I will*, says he, *make Samaria as an heap of  
the field, as plantings of a vineyard; and I will pour  
down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will dis-  
cover the foundations thereof.* The like doom and  
sentence is passed upon *Jerusalem*, that it should be  
plowed as a field, and turned into a forest, as was  
mentioned before.

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*ALL the hires thereof shall be burnt with fire: which shall destroy these cities, and consume all their wealth and substance. For they gathered it of the hire of an harlot, and unto a harlot's hire it shall return.* They imagined that they gained their wealth by the power and blessing of their strange Gods, as the reward of their idolatry; and it shall return and become a prey to the idolatrous *Affyrians* and *Babylonians*.

THE second woe denounced is captivity. 'Because, says God to the oppressors before mentioned, ye have devised iniquity against your poor brethren to dispossess them of their means and estates, I will devise evil against you; a yoke from which you shall not free your necks. *Jerusalem* shall lament with a doleful lamentation, and say; We are utterly spoiled: he hath changed the portion of my people: how hath he removed it from me? turning away he hath divided our fields. He hath removed his people out of their ancient inheritance, which he divided to them at first by lot, and hath given it to other Lords to inherit, who shall not cast lots for it, but take it by force: Arise, and depart hence, for this is not your rest. Because ye have polluted the land, it shall spue you out, as it did its former inhabitants the *Canaanites*. Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, oh daughter of *Sion*, like a woman in travel: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to *Babylon*; there shalt thou be delivered.'

THE third woe is the failure of the true Prophecy and Ministry of God's word among them. *Prophesie ye not, say they to them that prophezie.* They did not care to hear unpleasant truths. 'Therefore my Prophets shall prophezie no more to them; for they will not take shame to themselves;

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‘ selves; they still persist in their wicked ways.  
‘ O thou that art named of the house of *Jacob*,  
‘ but doest things unworthy of that name! Is the  
‘ Spirit of the Lord straitned? are these his doings?  
‘ or has not rather his Spirit abounded to you,  
‘ and strove with you thus far to no purpose?  
‘ Therefore night shall come upon you, that ye  
‘ shall have no vision, and darkness that ye shall  
‘ not divine. The sun shall go down upon the  
‘ Prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.  
‘ They shall cover their lips, as men used to do  
‘ under any great affliction, because there is no  
‘ answer, no revelation from God.’

THE fourth woe is a pining wasting sickness which should seize upon them. ‘ I will, says God,  
‘ make thee sick in smiting thee; I will make thee  
‘ desolate, because of thy sins. I will afflict thee  
‘ with an incurable disease which shall gradually  
‘ waste thy strength; with a consumption that  
‘ shall prey upon thy vitals.’

THE fifth woe threatened to these sinners, is famine. ‘ Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied, by  
‘ reason either of the scantiness of food, or the want  
‘ of a nourishing virtue in it. Thou shalt take  
‘ hold, but shalt not deliver. Whatever advantage thou shalt make by thy industry, thou shalt  
‘ not be able to keep it, but it shall become a  
‘ prey to thine enemies. Thou shalt sow, but  
‘ thou shalt not reap: thou shalt tread the  
‘ olives, but shalt not anoint thee with oil; and  
‘ sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine. For in  
‘ all these respects thou shalt drudge as a slave-un-  
‘ der the *Babylonians*, and they shall reap the fruit  
‘ of thy labours.’

LASTLY, The sixth woe which is heaped upon them, is the scorn and contempt wherewith their enemies should treat them. ‘ I will, says he,  
‘ make you a hissing; and ye shall bear the re-  
‘ proach



‘proach of my people.’ The Prophet directs his discourse to the great and rich men, and tells them, that since they, who should have been the pillars and defenders of Religion, have by their atheism given encouragement to Infidels to blaspheme God and trample upon his Church, therefore they should be objects of derision to their enemies, who should continually insult and lord it over them.

AND thus we have heard the Lord’s voice crying against the cities of *Samaria* and *Jerusalem*, arraigning them of their sins, and denouncing their punishments, as they are set forth by the Prophet *Micah*.

IN these charges and denunciations *the man of wisdom will see God’s name*, i. e. acknowledge his commission and authority in them as fully, as if he had seen him write them. They are all so consistent with his nature and attributes of Holiness, Justice and Truth, with the character which he has given of himself throughout his own word, with the covenant which he made with his people, and the conditions of his mercies and judgments, as they are recorded in many parts of Scripture, particularly *Levit. xxvi.* and *Deut. xxviii.* He that is not an infant or a child, but a man of wisdom, who has duly read the holy Scripture, and observed the providence of God, how he has made his word the rule of his former dispensations: He that considers the sins here complained of, and compares this prophecy of *Micah* with the Law and the Prophets, especially with the words of the cotemporary Prophet *Isaiah*, when he sees the exact agreement between them, he will receive this Prophecy as a message from the same God, as inspired by the same holy Spirit. The man of wisdom will see the name and hear the voice of God in all this; and confess, when the judgments are inflicted, that they are not fortuitous, coming in the ordi-

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ordinary course of things, or owing to the meer will of man, or concurrence of second causes; but that they are a rod from Heaven, which God hath appointed for the punishment of his sinful people.

THERE were indeed many cheats and impostors in those times, who counterfeited this great name of God, and pretended his commission, when he had not sent them. But a wise man might easily see the vanity of their pretensions by their conduct and deportment. For they made it their business to please their hearers, that they might be applauded and well rewarded by them. They were a sort of free-livers, who prophesied both *of and for wine and strong drink*; liberally dispensing their blessings for plenty, and making as free a use of it. One might easily perceive that they had no design to serve God, but their own bellies, and by good words and fair speeches to deceive those who were willing to be deceived. As for the wise man, he was in no danger of being mis-led by them.

BUT alas! how few such wise men are any where to be found? Our Prophet compares them to the gleaning after harvest or vintage; scarce two or three to be discovered by the most diligent search. *The best of our people*, says he, *is as a briar; the most upright is sharper than a thorn-bedge; i. e.* both unfruitful and untractable: deaf to the denunciations of God's judgments, and blind to the actual execution of them. When his hand was stretched out to punish them, they would not acknowledge it, but still leaned upon him, says *Micah*, and imputed his visitations to meer fortune and chance.

THIS is an atheistical infatuation which has always prevailed in the world, and done infinite mischief in it; that tho' men know their doings to be such as have rendered them obnoxious to the judgments of God, and have felt the correction

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of his rod in crosses and calamities which have befallen them; yet they are not thereby led to repentance, but go on securely in their old ways, and flatter themselves that God has no controversy with them, till they are swallowed up in utter destruction.

BUT the voice of wisdom teaches another lesson, and all wise men will practise it, as we have heard from our Prophet in the words of my Text. I will conclude with like words of another Prophet, I mean *Hosea*, who prophesied at the same time in the Kingdom of *Israel*, and closes his Book with these words: *Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.* May he inspire us with that Spirit of wisdom which may prevent our fall, and secure to us his saving health and protection, thro' the merits of *Jesus Christ* our Lord, to whom &c.







# SERMON XLVI.

*On the Twenty-first Sunday after*  
TRINITY.



PROVERBS i. 33.

*But whoso hearkeneth to me, shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.*

**T**HIS Book of *Proverbs* carries its Author's name in the very entrance and first words. I say, the Author; for *Solomon* is allowed by the most learned *Rabbies*, to be not barely the Collector, but Composer of these divine sentences: 'Tis part of the account of that supereminent Wisdom wherewith God endued him, that *he spoke three thousand Proverbs*, of which number this Book is but a part, containing not above *nine hundred*, as they stand divided in our Scriptures.

THO' in the History of the *Kings* and *Chronicles*, we read nothing of *Solomon*, from the time of his birth, till he came to sit upon the throne of *Israel*, yet he assures us in the fourth Chapter of this

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this Book of *Proverbs*, that his Father took great care of his education, and was always instilling into him the precepts and commendations of piety and virtue, charging him above all things to labour after a spirit of wisdom, the foundation of which was the fear of God. And we know how earnestly *David* besought God, *Psalms* lxxii. that he would instruct this his Son and Successor, and lead him in the ways of his laws and the works of his commandments.

To these prayers and good counsels we may impute it, that *Solomon* was so well inclined, that when God came to him in a Vision, at the beginning of his reign, and bid him ask whatever good thing he most desired, and it should be granted him, he readily petitioned for an understanding heart to judge his people, that he might discern between right and wrong, good and evil. This request God granted him in so great a measure, that he proved the wisest of the sons of men.

For tho' the Emperor *Julian*, who revolted from Christ to the idolatry of the Pagans, preferred their Philosophy before the Wisdom of *Solomon*, in which he is imitated by many Apostate Christians at this day, who magnifie Pagan Writers above the Holy Bible; yet a much wiser and better Prince than *Julian*, has recommended this single Book of *Proverbs* as 'a Treasury, so full  
' of golden sentences and moral precepts, in all  
' things that concern our conversation in this  
' World, as among all the prophane Philosophers  
' and Poets there is not to be found so rich a  
' store-house of natural wisdom, agreeing with the  
' will and divine wisdom of God.

Now the principles which *Solomon* lays down in this Chapter, for the grounding of his young student in the school of wisdom, are these three which follow. First, That he learn to fear God.

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*Secondly*, That he honour his parents; and *Thirdly*, That he avoid evil company. And these principles he presently enforces, like a good Preacher, with the motives of rewards and punishments.

IN the first place, *Solomon* lays it down as a first principle, and inscribes it, as I may say, over the door of his school, that the young man who enters there, in order to learn the lessons of wisdom, *must begin with the fear of God*. This he learned of his Father *David*, who has the same sentence, *Psalms* cxi. 10. And the reasons of it are largely set forth in that Book which bears the Title of *the Wisdom of Solomon*; which tho' apocryphal to us, yet contains a great deal of excellent matter to this purpose. It begins with an exhortation to the governing part of mankind, to think much of God, and apply their hearts to him for the attainment of wisdom. Which that they may receive, the Author calls upon them to cast out evil thoughts, and beware of the defilements of carnal affections; because froward thoughts separate from God; his wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body that is under the dominion of sin. The holy and loving Spirit of wisdom will never endure a perfidious heart, nor come near a nest of loose, vain, and wanton thoughts, nor abide there where unrighteousness hath free admittance.

WISDOM, proceeds he, is glorious, and never fadeth; she is easily seen of them that love her, and found of them that seek her. She preventeth them that desire her, in making herself first known to them. Whoso seeketh her early, shall not need to travel for her: he shall find her sitting at his doors. For she goeth about seeking such as are worthy of her, shews herself favourable to them in the way, and meets them in every thought. The very true beginning



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ning of her, is the desire of discipline; and the care of discipline is love: And love is the keeping of her laws: And the giving heed to her laws, is the assurance of incorruption, and incorruption raiseth us near to God.

NEXT, this Author tells us, in the person of Solomon, how he obtained Wisdom. 'I prayed,' says he, and understanding was given me: I called upon God, and the Spirit of Wisdom came upon me. I preferred her before Scepters and Thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her. I loved her above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of light: For the light that flows from her, is never extinguished. All good things came together with her: For in her is an understanding Spirit, holy, only begotten, manifold, subtile, lively, clear, undefiled, plain, not subject to hurt, loving the thing that is good, quick, which cannot be hindered, ready to do good: Kind to man, stedfast, sure, free from care, having all power, overseeing all things, and going thro' all understanding, pure and most subtile Spirits. Wisdom is most quick in motion; she passes and goes thro' all things by reason of her pureness. For she is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the Glory of the Almighty. She is the brightness of the everlasting light; the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness.

'This Wisdom I purposed to take to me for my Spouse, and with her to repose myself; For her conversation hath no bitterness nor sorrow, but mirth and joy. Nevertheless, perceiving that I could not obtain her, except God gave her to me (and that was a point of wisdom, to know whose gift she was) I prayed unto the Lord,

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Lord; and besought him to give me that Wisdom that sits by his Throne, to send her out of his Holy Heaven, and from the Throne of his Glory, that she might assist me, and make me know what is pleasing to God. For she knows and understands all things; she shall lead me and preserve me.

FROM all this we may reasonably conclude, that *Solomon's* Wisdom here recommended, is the illumination of the holy Spirit of God. The graces and comforts of that Divine Spirit can alone answer the properties of the Wisdom which is here described. And the way for any one to attain it, we find, is this, as here laid down, *viz.* To be bred up under a virtuous nurture and discipline, to subdue the sensual passions and affections; to accustom ones self to a solid way of thinking, and contemplating the beauties of piety and virtue: To call upon God by diligent prayer, and maintain an intimate communion with him, and to be perswaded that he is the only fountain of happiness, and that it is the greatest folly and madness to do any thing which is contrary to his holy Will and Commandment.

THIS is that *fear of the Lord* which is the beginning of *Wisdom*. And I wish this sentence were written in all our Courts, Councils, and places of education. For then I should hope it would make a due impression upon the minds of all those who frequent such places: I should hope it would prevail against that worldly wisdom which generally reigns there, and has nothing of the fear of God in it. I should then see those men despised and disclaimed by a general suffrage, who now are celebrated as the wisest heads, while they almost disown, they certainly make no good appearance in any form of religion whatever. I should then see that good rule put in practice, which some of our  
own

own Princes have declared for and applauded, that *none but persons of approved piety should be called up to any publick employment.* Which rule whether ever it has been observed or not, is however a great justification of Solomon's maxim, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Briefly, I should see that opinion exploded, which at present is very much in fashion, that a man may be wise, able, and useful in the World, with a very small sense of God, or concern for the honour of his name and the state of his true religion and worship.

II. NEXT after the fear of God, our royal Preacher enjoyns honour and obedience to parents, as a lesson very necessary to be learned by his young student in wisdom. This likewise he often repeats and insists upon in this Book of *Proverbs*; placing it next in order to the fear of God, according to the method observed in the Ten Commandments. For there God himself, as soon as he hath enacted the Laws which concern his own worship, presently commands children to honour their parents, as the most fundamental duty of society and good government in the World.

THIS is the general rule, and the Scripture makes no exceptions from it. Not but that God knew there would be parents which would set their children a bad example, and give them wrong advice in some things. And surely he does not oblige children to hearken to such advice, and follow such examples, when they grow up, and are able to judge for themselves. But children being by the condition of their birth subject to their parents, are bound to live in that subjection. In such a state of minority they have no power or right to govern themselves, or to act according to their own will and pleasure. And whatever principles or manners parents may be of, this is evident



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dent in experience, that infinitely more mischief arises from children's disobedient and obstinate spirits, than from their governable and tractable dispositions in any family whatever.

So that obedience must be the general rule: God and Nature have so ordained it. God commands parents to breed up their children in the ways of piety and virtue; to be frequently instilling wholesome instructions into their tender minds: and nature directs them to wish the salvation of their posterity, and advise them the best they can, how to attain it. Upon these grounds it is, that children are obliged by all Laws, divine and human, to hearken to their parents. It is presumed that parents, however they may follow their own sinful passions, will not indulge their children in libertinism, but rather correct them for it, and endeavour to make them better than themselves. They are justly esteemed as monsters, and therefore I hope rarely to be found, who shall make it their business, by any counsel or advice, to debauch the manners of their own children. I hope there are no members of civil society, for of vagrants and thieves I cannot pretend to any such hopes, but I persuade myself there are no settled Families amongst us, where children are not taught, by some means or other, that there is a God, that it is their duty to pray to him, and to live in his fear, and to read and hear his word, and follow the instructions of it. I am too sensible these things are not inculcated so constantly and carefully as they should be; but I cannot think there are any families so deeply sunk in prophaneness, as wholly to neglect them.

As to the condition of children, they cannot teach or govern themselves, but must be under the tuition of parents or others, who must govern

vern them during their infancy and childhood; whose voice they must hearken to, and obey their commands, otherwise there can be no such thing as education or government.

How careful this wise Preacher was, to make children of a tractable and obedient disposition, appears from his much insisting upon this duty, and declaring it to be the second fountain of Wisdom; intimating that children who would be diligent to receive good instruction, should never want it, and thereby should attain to an excellent spirit, and encrease in the esteem and favour of God and man.

ON the other hand, *Solomon* calls upon us to take notice, that the child who is of a froward spirit, and averse to the instructions of his parents and teachers, will prove an empty, inconsiderable man; that he lies open to all the temptations of Atheism and Immorality; for, says he, *a scorner beareth not reproof; nothing can withhold him from rushing headlong in the way of his own brutish passions: That he is in the high road to destruction, and many times comes to an untimely and shameful end: For the eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it. And that if he escapes this, yet in conclusion this uninstructed, untractable wretch shall become a burden to himself, when his body and estate are consumed, and his soul oppressed with the guilt of his impieties, he shall mourn, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof! and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!*

III. *SOLOMON* recommends it, as a fundamental point of true Wisdom, to avoid the company of evil-doers. *My Son, if Sinners entice thee,*

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*that, consent thou not. Walk not in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path.* He tells his young Scholar, that while he keeps at a distance, disengaged from bad company, he easily perceives the fatal snares and pits which are in their ways: But if he once takes a pleasure in their conversation, he quickly loses his eyes, and becomes as blind as they: The Spirit of God deserts him, and an evil genius takes possession of him.

THE several steps of this infatuation will be easily seen, by comparing what we find, *Wisdom ii.* with what we have here before us.

IN that Chapter we find ungodly men exciting one another to the pursuit of sensual pleasures, from the following Topicks.

*First, FROM the shortness and uncertainty of this life.* 'We came but lately into the World, say they, and we must quickly go out of it. For our time passeth away like a shadow. We are by a fatal necessity subjected to many sufferings and infirmities, and must shortly be cut off by death, and be committed to the prison of the grave, from whence there is no redemption.'

*Secondly, FROM the supposed mortality both of Soul and Body.* For the most comfortable hypothesis of wicked men is this, that when they are once dead, all is at an end with them. If they can but set a tolerable face and colour upon the doctrine of the Soul's mortality, they easily justify their corrupt practices, and win Profelytes over to their side. Hence it becomes most natural and familiar to them to reason at the rate here represented, that as we are born into the World like all other earthly animals, so like them we shall end in earth again, and be as if we had never been. 'That the breath in our nostrils is but as smoke, and life as a spark



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moving in our hearts. Which being extinguished, our Body turns into ashes, and our Spirit vanishes as the soft air. Our name shall be quickly forgotten, together with our works: Our life shall pass away as the trace of a cloud; it shall be dispersed as a mist before the Sun-beams, which is overcome with the heat of the day.

*Thirdly*, **UNGOONLY** men do their utmost to strengthen their party, that they may out-number the servants of God. For being Atheists in practice, they desire to make all the world so in principle; and because religion is against them, they are bitter enemies to all religion. Against which the summ of their reasoning is this. Come, say they, let us take counsel against the righteous man, because he is not for our turn; he is quite contrary to our doings: He upbraids us with our offending the Law, and objects to our infamy the transgressions of our education. He professeth to have the knowledge of God; and calls himself the child of the Lord. He was made to reprove our principles. He is a grievous eye-sore to us: his life and ways are quite different from ours. We are esteemed of him as counterfeits: he abstains from our ways, as from filthiness: he pronounceth the end of the Just to be blessed, and maketh his boast that God is his Father. Let us see if his words be true: Let us examine him with despitefulness and torture, and condemn him with a shameful death: that we may make tryal of his boasted meekness; and prove his patience under sufferings.

FROM such Topicks as these, wicked men animate one another to enjoy the present state of things, and take their fill of pleasure in it. Come, say they to their new acquaintance, *cast in your lot*

VI among

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*among us, and you shall find in our society every thing that you can wish.*

And when they have consumed their substance in riotous living, that they may raise new supplies for their lusts, they fail not to oppress and squeeze all those who are in their power, without any regard of merit, or of the circumstances of people. They spare not the fatherless and widow, they reverence not the gray hairs of the aged.

Now farther, the glittering temptation of heaping up silver and gold, and filling their houses with rich spoils, incites them, not seldom, to lay wait for blood, to lurk privately for the innocent without cause. So that many a Libertine, from extravagant squandering upon his carnal lusts, has come to associate with cheats and robbers, to turn perjured informer or false witness, or to abuse any trust, office, or authority which he hath had, in doing vile work, for the sake of enriching himself by some great reward.

Now when such temptations as these, first to spend, and then to repair expences by the works of iniquity, are cast in the way of a young man, who has strong passions, weak reason, no experience, they light like fire upon combustible matter, they presently set him in a flame, by which, without Divine Mercy as great as a miracle, he must inevitably perish.

And therefore it is a fundamental point of Wisdom, as Solomon here represents it, for all men, especially the younger sort, to avoid evil company; in which whenever they willingly venture themselves, they do as dangerous a thing as if they went into a pest-house, they will certainly be infected. The Spirit of God, which alone could, and would secure them, if they did not throw themselves into temptation, departs from them,

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them, and that justly; for they go where he cannot enter; they quit the service of their heavenly King, and go over to the tents of ungodliness. They leave the interest of true Wisdom, to embrace that of folly and madness; as will appear by a short view of the rewards and punishments which the Royal Preacher propounds, in order to enforce the rules which he laid down for the attainment of Wisdom.

To begin with the Punishment of fools, he introduces Wisdom, or rather God in the person of Wisdom, making this declaration to them. *Because I called, and ye refused; I stretched out my hands, and none of you regarded: but ye despised my counsel, and were deaf to my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh.* You Atheists have had your season of probation and day of Grace, wherein I have shown you how much it was your interest to believe in God and to fear him; and by voices from heaven, by the mouth of my Prophets, by the dispensations of my Providence I have called you from darkness to light, and from the tyranny of Satan to the freedom of my children. But since after all my demonstrations you have denied me, and blasphemed me for all my condescensions, I will at last extort a confession from you, that it had been your wisdom to have hearkned to me, and that your deafness to my instructions, and secret wishes that there were no God, was such a fatal delusion and misconduct, as can never be repaired. For such distress and desolation from without, such anguish and terrors within, shall seize upon you, as neither you, nor any of your friends, nor any created power shall be able to remove. In these deplorable circumstances you shall have recourse to the aids of religion, and beg of God with earnest



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earnest prayers and supplications to arise and help you, and deliver you for his mercy's sake. But your prayers shall all vanish in the air, they shall never enter into my ears. Tho' you invoke me with the greatest importunity, I will not answer; tho' you apply to seek me carefully and early, you shall not find me. Because in the days of your prosperity, you hated the knowledge of God, and were nothing affected with my fear. Neither my instructions of righteousness, nor reproof of sin, made any useful impressions upon you. Therefore you shall even reap what you have sowed, and eat the fruit of your own planting. You shall find, that your sinful security was your ruin, and your impious enjoyments a fool's paradise, a meer dream and imagination of happiness.

SUCH is the sentence which God pronounces upon the folly of irreligion; and he has pronounced it by the mouth of the wise *Solomon*, an unexceptionable judge, from whom there can lye no reasonable appeal. He has taught us to call impiety Folly, and that with the truest propriety of speech. For it is such a folly as doth not betray a man to a little transitory damage and contempt, but it leads him to mistake his main interest, to chuse his entire destruction. It is worse than that *Sardonian* laughter, which old Physicians speak of, a disease whereof the Patient died laughing. The foolish Atheist laughs while he is mortally sick and miserably racked within, and affectedly rallying all that is sacred, goes down to the place of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

FROM this sentence we learn the false doctrine of Atheistical men, That *God is always ready to bear them.* We thankfully acknowledge his gracious promises, that he is always ready to hear his own children, to be found of them who are

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accustomed to seek him, to be near those who often draw nigh to him. *The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers;* but his face is set against those who despise and blaspheme him; and when they call upon him in the day of adversity, (for at no other time will they seriously think of him,) he affirms them here before-hand, that he will not hear them.

THE contrary doctrine is propagated by the friends of impiety, on purpose to support such rebels as themselves in their Enmity against Heaven to the very last: *Whose gates must always stand open to the work of men, and the great King be ready with open arms to receive them, whenever they desire admittance;* if we will believe these perverters of sacred writ.

BUT God and Nature, common sense and reason, forbid any to enter there, but only such as now hearken to the Voice of Wisdom, to the Spirit of true understanding speaking in the divine word and ordinances, and calling them to the knowledge and obedience of God. This is the very reason why Solomon dignifies such men with the character of Wise, because they make a right choice of the way wherein they are to walk, and pay a due and timely regard to those Exhortations which reach them to fear God, to attend to the good instructions of parents and teachers, and to avoid the conversation of those who offend God with their Atheism, lewdness, riotous living, or any gross and contemptuous violation of his holy Laws. They who are so wise as to fear God, and to decline communication with his Enemies, are entitled to the blessing of my Text; they shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. They shall be delivered from those fears and terrors of a guilty conscience, which haunt the Scorners of religion:

They

**Tuesday first Sunday after TRINITY. 11;**

They shall be comforted and confirmed under all dispensations by a rational faith, hope, and trust in God; and finally they shall have the portion of the wise Virgins who were prudently prepared to meet the Bridegroom of their Souls, and shall be admitted into the same joy of their Lord, thro' his merits who liveth &c.

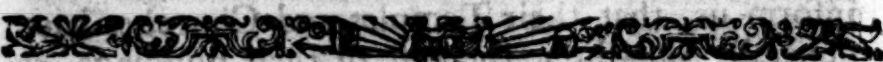






# SERMON XLVII.

*On the Twenty-second Sunday after*  
TRINITY.



PROVERBS iii. 9, 10.

*Honour the Lord with thy substance, and  
with the first-fruits of all thine increase:  
so shall thy barns be filled with plenty,  
and thy presses shall burst out with new  
wine.*



THE author of my Text, when he had built a most sumptuous and magnificent Temple for the worship of God, humbly acknowledges that neither Earth nor Heaven could afford any thing worthy of the divine Majesty, who is all-sufficient and infinitely happy without the services of Angels or Men. But they are wretched and destitute of all felicity, without the gracious providence of the most High, to which they must ever recommend themselves by proper acts of homage and wor-

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worship. So that tho' Religion contributes nothing to the happiness of the Deity, yet is it absolutely necessary for the well-being of us his creatures, who derive all our comforts from his infinite fulness.

Now we are bound to honour and serve God, not only with the words of our mouth and the meditations of our heart, but also with our worldly goods, by applying a share of them to the support and maintenance of Religion, in subsisting those who are set apart for the administration of God's Word and Sacraments, and erecting or upholding the sacred Edifices, where they are to be administered.

THE Histories of all civilized Countries will inform us, that their Temples and Churches have generally out-shone the rest of their buildings, as well in their outward state and magnificence, as in the richness of their inward ornaments and furniture: And what exact care was taken to keep them clean and undefiled, we may conclude from the ancient and present custom in the *East*, where the people are not permitted to enter into them with any soil upon their feet.

As for the whole Nation of the *Jews*, that they were very studious of cleanliness in their religious Worship, we are abundantly assured by the *Levitical Law*, and various passages in the *Psalms* and the *Prophets*. *Maimonides*, that great Oracle of the latter *Rabbies*, observes, that it was not lawful for any man to enter into their holy Places in his working apparel, or dusty sandals. And even here, in these western parts of the world, they still conform to these ancient rites of veneration, as far as the nature of the Country will permit.

As for the *Mahometans*, those who have been diligent observers of their ways, and have had the  
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best opportunity for it, by living many years among them, have often told us, that when they come to their Mosques to prayers, they wash themselves, put off their shoes, and leave them at the door, or else enter in very clean sandals.

AND that we may not want an instance of this purity amongst Christians, an Ethiopian Bishop, who came Ambassador from Abyssinia to Portugal about two hundred years ago, gives much the same account of his Countrymen, that they are not allowed to go into the Church with their shoes on, nor to walk, or talk, or laugh, or so much as spit there, but must compose themselves to the greatest decency and gravity.

THE conclusion which I would draw from these Histories, is naturally this, That all these people adorned their places of worship with the choicest furniture, and preserved them in the most elegant and cleanly condition; otherwise their delicacy had been absurd and ridiculous, in prohibiting any defilement to be brought into a place which was defiled before, and, as it is too often seen amongst us, had not the cleanliness of one of our own houses.

I confess such an external sanctity may seem very impracticable, and very superstitious to us, who have undergone so many revolutions in our Religion, that our notions of these things are horribly vitiated; and many amongst us who are grave professors of inward purity, are such avowed enemies to all outward ornaments of worship, that they would reduce their Saviour to the primitive entertainment of the stable and the manger.

BUT such prophane avarice is most contrary to the injunction of my Text, *That we should honour our Lord with our best substance*; and to the whole tenor of holy Scripture, which every where requires decency, beauty, and order, in our religious



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gious worship. And that with regard to the Majesty of God, who is higher than the highest, and yet humbleth himself to behold the things that are in Heaven and in Earth. And tho' he dwelleth not in Temples made with hands, in that notion which the Gentiles had of their Deities, that they were confined day and night to those places where their shrines were fixed and dedicated, yet has he declared that he prefers sacred above common houses, and that in them more especially will he hear and accept the prayers of his people. And accordingly devout men and women of all generations have resorted to such places for religious Communion with God, and esteemed it as their greatest infelicity when they have been driven from them, or when such places have been perverted to other uses. Which regret has arisen from this persuasion, that they have been debarred from the more immediate presence of God, and could not hold such free and filial communion with him any where, as in his holy Temple.

All mankind have ever been of opinion, that God and his holy Angels are present in a more especial manner in these consecrated places. And accordingly the Ministers of Religion do commonly make an argument of this awful presence, to entice the people to more than ordinary reverence and attention. St. Paul speaking of comely and decent ornaments to be used in religious Assemblies, and particularly that women should be veiled on such occasions, enforces this rule from the presence of Angels, 1 Cor. xii. 10. For this cause, says he, ought the woman to have a covering on her head, because of the Angels; i. e. because of their more special presence there; for otherwise the reason will not hold, that women should be more covered in the house of prayer than any where else, if the Angels were not more present there than in other places.

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THE ancient Fathers of the Church perswade their people to a venerable deportment in their religious Assemblies, from the like consideration, that they are under the inspection of heavenly Beings, as will appear from a few of many passages, which I shall here lay before you.

ST. *Chrysostom*, Hom. 36. on 1 *Cor.* reproves the irreverent behaviour of his auditory in talking, walking, and saluting one another; he tells them they were singular in such freedoms, such as no Christians in the world presumed to take in the Church besides themselves; and he enforces his reproof with such words as come home to our purpose. 'The Church, says he, is no market, publick house, factor's hall, or workman's shop; but a place frequented by Angels and Archangels, the palace of God, and an embleme of Heaven.'

The same eloquent Father, towards the end of his fourth Homily concerning *the incomprehensible Nature of God*, speaks to this effect. 'Consider in whose presence you stand, and with whom you join in the invocation of God; with no less than Cherubims and Seraphims, and all the Powers of Heaven. Do but remember what company you are in, and it will be sufficient to perswade you to be modest and serious, when you consider that you who are composed of flesh and blood, are joined with the incorporeal powers to celebrate the common Lord of all.'

AGAIN, Hom. 15. on the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, against those who laughed in the Church: 'If, says he, you were in a Prince's court, you would compose your dress, your looks, and your whole carriage to modesty and gravity. But know that you are in the palace and court of heavenly Beings; and will you wantonly laugh in their presence? 'Tis true, you do not see them; but know that Angels are every where, and

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‘ and chiefly in the house of God, attending upon  
‘ their King, whose presence is filled with those  
‘ incorporeal Powers.’

LASTLY, In his sixth Book of the *Priesthood*,  
near the beginning, speaking there of the Time  
when the Eucharist is celebrated, he affirms, that  
‘ the Angels stand by the Priest, and that there is  
‘ a whole choir of celestial Beings round about  
‘ the altar, in honour of him who is laid thereon.’  
And St. *Ambrose* teaches the same doctrine: ‘ Doubt  
‘ not but an Angel is more immediately present,  
‘ whenever Christ is offered.’

I shall only add a passage out of *Tertullian* to  
this purpose, who lived within two hundred years  
after Christ; it is in his discourse of *prayer*, where  
reproving the unmannerly carriage of some who  
sat at the prayers of the Church, he tells them:  
‘ If it be an uncivil thing to sit before a man who  
‘ is much your superior, and deserves to be re-  
‘ spected of you, what a prophane gesture is it to  
‘ sit in the presence of the living God, the Angel  
‘ of prayer standing by you? By such an act you  
‘ do in effect upbraid the divine Majesty with the  
‘ wearisomness of his service.’

Now if any man will go about to elude this  
argument for decency in Churches, by saying, that  
whatever appearances of Angels there were in the  
patriarchal and primitive times, there are no ma-  
nifestations of them in our worship at this day:  
Why true it is, we have no outward demonstra-  
tions of their presence; but it is a most unquesti-  
onable and eminent part of their Ministry to be  
guardians and attendants about the servants of  
Christ, *Heb. i. 14.* to maintain communion be-  
tween the Church militant and triumphant, and to  
support us against the tyranny and machinations of  
reprobate spirits. If we are destitute of such guar-  
dianship and assistance from them, especially at the  
time



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time and place of religious worship, the fault must be our own; either in that we neglect and contemn the Church of Christ, or behave so unsuitably in it, as causeth these holy Spirits to leave our society, and leave us to our own sordid genius. But if we are truly careful to worship God in a becoming manner, if we honour him with our substance as well as with our souls and bodies, then we are sure that such pure and hallowed devotions will be regarded by the heavenly Inhabitants with pleasure and joy, as nearly approaching to the beauties of their own holiness.

AND thus you have heard the argument of *St. Paul* and the primitive Fathers, which pleads for the dignity and reverence of God's house above all other places. Who now that considers and believes this, will not cry out with devout *Jacob*, when he saw the Angels ascending and descending at *Bethel*, *How venerable are these places?* What an awe and dread should they strike into us? For every place dedicated to God is a *Bethel*, where there is a more immediate communication between Heaven and Earth. How willing should we be to honour the Lord with our substance, in adorning such places? How modest and serious when we come hither to present our selves before him?

CERTAINLY 'tis most unjust and impious in man to deny God a place where his honour may dwell. And very amazing it is, that any sect of Christians should esteem it a proper demonstration of their zeal for his name, to demolish or deface the buildings or ornaments of Religion, when our Lord himself hath assured us, that not to repair them, when there is occasion, provokes the divine Wrath. For he chastised the prophane of the Temple with remarkable indignation, and hath thereby condemned those false pretenders to his holy Spirit, who set up for a mental devotion against  
all

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all outward ceremony and solemnity: grounding themselves upon such passages of Scripture which call for spiritual Worship, which say that the bodies of sanctified Christians are Temples of the Holy Ghost. These expressions, most excellent in themselves, are not intended to abrogate the outward profession and method of Religion; for this would be to extinguish the light of Christ's Gospel before men. But we have not so learned Christ: We have heard from his own words, that whose preferreth any thing of this world before him, is not worthy of him; and that none but his enemies and persecutors rejoice, when he is stripped of the ornaments and ensigns of his honour.

It is very perverse and absurd in any man, to pretend a zeal for exalting Christ's Kingdom, while they throw down the pillars of it, and refuse to contribute to those outward means, which alone can propagate his faith in the world. When I say, *alone*, I mean, as the course of things is now settled. For the divine Power can work his good pleasure and execute his decrees in what way and manner soever he pleases. But at present, outward means are the only way whereby he chuses to make himself known upon Earth.

SUCH are the reasons on the side of Religion, why we should adorn it with our substance, to render it amiable, that we may take the greater delight in it ourselves, and make it to be admired and embraced by others.

LET us now see what temporal advantage we may hope for to our selves, by thus dedicating some part of our substance to the service of God.

THE author of my Text expended a vast treasure in building the Temple at Jerusalem, and therefore he was able from his own experience to speak of the success of such piety. You hear what he says in my Text. And the History of his

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his Life informs us, that his reign was prosperous and full of peace and quietness, that he had great forces by sea and land, that he exceeded all the Kings of the Earth in riches, and that his people enjoyed an affluence of all good things.

GOD every where appeals to his people, and the History of his dealings with them makes it evident, that they were always well rewarded for every thing which they laid out to his honour and service. And he promises the like blessings to those that should contribute to the structure and furniture of the second Temple. 'There is not  
' a man among you, says he, that shuts a door in  
' my house, or kindles a fire on mine altar for no-  
' thing. Bring ye all the tithes into the store-  
' house, that there may be meat in my house, and  
' prove me now herewith, if I will not open you  
' the windows of Heaven, and pour you out a  
' blessing, that there shall not be room enough to  
' receive it. And all Nations shall call you bless-  
' ed; for ye shall be a delightful Land, saith  
' the Lord of Hosts.' *Malachi i. iii.*

BUT we need not be over-curious in searching the records of ancient times, to discover what temporal advantages and tokens of God's love they have received, who have erected or repaired any of his houses; and what damages they have sustained, who have acted a contrary part. We cannot but see many instances of both sorts amongst our selves. There are at this day many families, whose ancestors were very rich and honourable, now covered with obscurity and poverty, and just enough left of them to be monuments of God's displeasure, because they were instrumental in demolishing his Churches, or alienating the revenues of them. On the other hand, many families who have been the restorers of such depredations, live in great esteem and prosperity, and  
are



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are visibly blessed with the favour of God and man. Even the publick state, I doubt not, flourishes in proportion to the honour and glory which is given to God this way. I am very much persuaded, that the health and peace and plenty which we have long enjoyed, is the reward of that Zeal for the Church of Christ, and the education of poor children in his Religion, which, thanks be to God, has for a long time shone forth eminently amongst us.

THIS City in particular has escaped the judgments of pestilence, famine, and sword, and daily improves in strength and beauty, because the houses of God are for the most part repaired and supported in a becoming manner, and his worship well frequented and performed in them.

AND thus much of the temporal advantages which we daily reap, by dedicating part of our substance to the honour of God in these places.

BUT the spiritual Blessings which are here exhibited to us, are principally to be regarded by us. We have here a place which is an emblem of Heaven, wherein the Majesty of God vouchsafes to hold a more intimate and special communion with us. Where we meet together to make that open confession of Christ, which he has promised to recompense with owning us before Angels and men at the last day. Here we assemble together to offer up our prayers and thanksgivings with united hearts and voices to the throne of Grace. Here the Word and Sacraments, the means of our sanctification and renovation of mind, are solemnly and devoutly administered to us. In short, here all the articles of faith, and rules of a righteous, sober, and godly life, are so constantly inculcated, that no man who yields any reasonable attention to them, can be ignorant of them.

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BY God's blessing upon this method of teaching in our Churches every Lord's day, our Religion has been preserved and conveyed down to us, thro' all the persecutions which the enemies of it have raised to suppress and extinguish it. In-  
somuch that *Julian* the Apostate, who imployed his imperial authority and great learning to set up the superstition of the *Pagans* against it, when he had tried all the arts and methods which he could invent, he could find nothing more effectual to his purpose, than to recommend it to his Hea-  
then Priests, that they should preach up the wor-  
ship of Idols to the people once a week, in like manner as the Ministers of the Gospel did the Christian Religion. And this might have condu-  
ced much to the accomplishment of his design, if the native worth and excellence of Christianity had not quite overbalanced the levities and absur-  
dities of Idolatry. But the doctrines of our holy Religion, containing in them the sublimest prin-  
ciples of divine Knowledge, and the best precepts of holy Living, nothing could be better contri-  
ved to lead men to true happiness, as well in this life as in that which is to come, than to have them weekly taught and explained in publick, so that all Christians may have them as it were con-  
tinually sounding in their ears. And the civil Go-  
vernment of every Christian Nation is no less be-  
nefited hereby, than the Ecclesiastical. Because every one is here constantly admonished of his du-  
ty to God, his Neighbour, and himself: Subjects are instructed to obey those who have lawful au-  
thority over them, children to be dutiful to their parents, servants to be faithful to their masters, and all superiors and parents to be merciful and af-  
fectionate to their relatives and dependents.

IN the regular discharge of which duties the happiness of every Family, Society, and Country

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consists. To be weekly excited to these social virtues and good offices, is certainly the most proper means to induce men to the practice of them. And we may justly conclude, that the publick weal and tranquility maintained amongst us, is owing to this more than to any other kind of discipline. And it is not to be doubted, but if our Churches were taken away, and this method of teaching failed, the generality of people, in a very few years, would fall into as gross ignorance and barbarity, as were ever known amongst the worst of our *Pagan* ancestors.

LET us testify our grateful acknowledgments of the benefits and comforts which we receive here, by dedicating part of our substance to the repairs and ornaments of this sacred Place, and that *not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver.* As we desire that our heavenly Father should make haste to help us whenever we cry unto him, so let us shew our selves zealous and forward to honour him with his own gifts, that he may behold in every one of us a willing mind to render unto him the tribute and homage of obedient servants, and then we shall rejoice in his presence, and in the light of his countenance, as having a well-grounded assurance of his gracious approbation and acceptance of us.

BUT while I am exciting you to honour God by your cheerful contributions to the repairs of his house, I must not omit the due praises of one who hath already contributed to this work; I mean that pious and charitable Matron, lately translated from this to a superior and happier Communion, who seriously laid to heart the ruinous condition of this house, and begun the repairs of it by a bountiful donation, which I hope will amount to a third part of the expences which have been laid out upon it. Blessed be God



for raising up amongst us such an eminent instrument of his honour and our comfort, and blessed be all those who have concurred with this good motion, and lent their assistance to set forward and to accomplish this most necessary, most laudable work.

**I**T now remains that we all make a right good use of this blessing, and study to answer the design and reason of it, by frequenting and duly attending upon the worship of God in this place. *Let us not forsake the assembling of our selves together, as the manner of some is, who despise the communion of Saints, and disown the family and household of faith, and therefore no wonder if they grudge to part with any thing which is demanded of them for the support of such communion.*

**B**UT I am perswaded that far the greatest part, if not every one here present, is endued with a better spirit and sense of his true interest, and that the inconveniencies we have suffered by a short interruption of our meeting together in this place, have raised our esteem of the advantages and comforts we enjoy in the use of it.

**L**ET us be careful to accompany this outward adorning with a suitable behaviour, with the sanctification of our souls and bodies, offering to God the sacrifice of clean hands and pure hearts, that after we have glorified him here with all our talents, all our faculties of mind, body, and estate, we may be glorified of him in that Church which knows no ruin nor decay, *that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*, which our blessed Saviour hath prepared for and opened to all Believers; to whom with the Father &c.



# SERMON XLVIII.

*On the Twenty-third Sunday after*  
TRINITY.



PROVERBS xii. 1.

*Whoso loveth instruction, loveth knowledge;  
but he that hateth reproof, is brutish.*

**M**ANIFOLD are the arguments which the royal Preacher useth, to engage our attention to the precepts and wise counsels which are written in this Book. The first is, the advantage which such precepts are of, to improve a man's carriage and conversation. *They shall, says he, be an ornament of grace to thy head, and chains about thy neck.* The richest attire which can be laid upon the body, renders it not so amiable, as Manners formed upon the rules of wisdom and virtue. Secondly, They are a safeguard against the mischiefs of evil company. *From the wicked man, says he, and from the strange woman, who rejoyce to do evil, and forsake the covenant of God, discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.* Thirdly, They are the best preservatives

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vatives of health and long life, because a wise man lives by the rules of temperance, soberness and chastity, and by his piety keeps under the defence of the most High, and the shadow of the Almighty, who protects him from those evil accidents to which he is exposed by the frailty of his nature, and the malice of his enemies ghostly and bodily. *Fourthly*, In the ways of Wisdom is to be found peace with God, with man, and with our own conscience, the truest enjoyment of the good things of this life, and a sure and certain hope of that which is to come. *Upright men*, says our great Oracle, *shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it.* They that study sincerely to please God, shall peaceably enjoy what they possess, and shall leave it to their posterity after them. 'They shall find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. For the merchandise, or profit of wisdom, is more advantageous than that of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things that can be desired, are not to be compared to her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand, riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her; and happy is every one that retaineth her.'

SUCH are the arguments and reasons (weighty ones indeed) which *Solomon* urges, to persuade us to hearken to his precepts of Wisdom.

BUT yet he tells us, there are several sorts of men, who will be never the wiser nor better for what he says. And they are,

*First*, SUCH as are stupid, and have no palate to relish any thing but sensual earthly pleasures. People of this class (and they are very numerous) think and act as if they were all flesh and no spirit,



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rit. They are like the horse and mule which have no understanding. They must be governed with the whip and rod of correction. Good counsels and instructions are but thrown away upon them. *Speak not in the ears of such a foolish man, says Solomon, for he will despise the wisdom of your words.* Let your discourse be never so ingenious or instructive, it is but like singing to the deaf, or offering colours to the blind; he has no faculty to perceive it. The price of wisdom is of no use to him; tho' it be in his hand, he has no heart to make the purchase. Tho' you should bray him in a mortar with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.

*Secondly,* THE froward man, who is under the dominion of his lusts and passions, benefits not by the precepts of Wisdom. *Every one, says our Master, that is of a froward heart, is an abomination to the Lord:* He will walk in his own ways, and do that which seems good in his own sight, tho' God should thunder from Heaven, or send one from the dead to convert him.

IF his delight be in strife and contention, 'tis no check upon him to hear from God's word, that the measure which he metes to others, shall be measured to him again; he goes on notwithstanding to sow the seeds of dissension among those who would live peaceably, and to separate the dearest friends by his backbiting and whispering, if they will give ear to his false stories. Or if his appetites be strongly turned to luxury and lewdness, he is not at all moved, tho' he sees *Solomon* pointing at him as an ox going to the slaughter, or a fool to the correction of the stocks. Briefly, if anger be his reigning passion, he seldom grows more mild and gentle by hearing our Preacher discourse upon these topicks, That the discretion of a man deferreth his anger, and that it is his glory

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to pass over a transgression: That the more understanding any man hath, the slower he is to be enflamed with this passion, which is no where indulged but in the bosom of fools; and that the greater his spirit is, the less apt is he to be provoked, or to avenge himself on those who have happened to offend him. It affects him not to hear our wise King pass a sentence of excommunication upon him, in charging his young student in divine philosophy thus, *Prov. xxii. 24, 25. Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man you shall not go: Lest you learn his ways, and get a snare to your soul.* 'It will be a very difficult task for you  
'to preserve your temper, when your passionate  
'friend is under a commotion; and that being his  
'natural humour, may very frequently happen,  
'and bring you into danger of your life, both  
'with himself, and with others against whom he  
'may engage you in his quarrels. Therefore con-  
'tract no friendship with cholerick and froward  
'men.'

Thirdly, The proud conceited man will be no proficient in Solomon's school of wisdom. *Seeft thou,* says he, *xxvi. 12. a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool, a meer idiot, than of such a man.* For he is wiser in his own conceit, than seven men that can render a reason, or give a good answer to any question that is proposed to them. This conceit is commonly the child of prosperity. When a man of an ordinary capacity has proved successful in his affairs so as to be grown rich, he is apt to impute his success to his own abilities, and to fancy himself as much superior to others in wisdom as in wealth. And how high such men often carry it, above sacred Ordinances, above the Prophet, the Priest, and even the Son of God himself, is too well known; for they themselves proclaim it by their own behaviour.

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vibour. But he that will fear the Lord, and depart from evil, must begin with this lesson of humility, *not to be wise in his own eyes.*

*Fourthly,* THE negligent and slothful man grows never the wiser under the means of wisdom. *The idle soul,* says Solomon, *shall suffer hunger:* He means it of bodily wants, but it is no less true in the spiritual sense. For the gifts of the mind, as well as those of the body and estate, are the rewards of study and labour. Therefore he tells his candidate of wisdom, that *he must dig for her as for silver, and search for her as for hid treasure.* He must incline his ear, and apply his heart very seriously for the obtaining of her; he must seek to God and man, and thankfully embrace all those means which are afforded him, to get wisdom. If he refuse the means, he shall never attain the end. But as he who neglects to plow and sow his land, shall have no harvest of it: So he that will not be at the pains to cultivate his mind with the instructions of wisdom, shall be sure to have it overrun with the ill weeds of ignorance, folly and vanity.

*Fifthly,* Men of a vain and frothy spirit, who love to turn serious things into ridicule, are unprofitable hearers of the precepts of wisdom. There was such a generation of fools in Solomon's days, who, instead of repenting, made a jest of their sins: And there were multitudes of scorers, who pretended to seek Wisdom, but never desired to find it; for their business was only to cavil at the precepts of it; to give them a wrong turn, to depreciate them, and make them of no esteem or moment in the world. Hence it is, that Wisdom is introduced at the beginning of this Book, exclaiming against these wretches, *How long, ye scorers, will ye delight in scorning?* Where lies the pleasure of scoffing at Religion and Virtue, that ye will never



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never give it over? Is any of you so wise, that he wants no Monitor? Or is ignorance so laudable, that a man should hate those who would inform him better? But let them alone, says Wisdom to her teachers; cast not away your pains upon such unworthy objects. They will not hear your reproofs; they will but hate you for them. A prophane man, who makes a mock of God and Religion, loves not to reason with himself about such matters, and hates those that reprove him: which makes him avoid religious Assemblies, for fear of hearing such reprehensions as are justly due to him. Let him be punished as he deserves, that others whom he hath deluded, may be awakened to greater circumspection. Let him be cast out of the society of men, and then the contests which he is wont to raise, will go out together with him. *Judgments are prepared for such scorers, and stripes for the backs of such fools.*

AND thus we have seen Solomon's characters of the stupid fool, the froward man, the conceited, slothful, scornful, vain part of the world; what little hope there is of their profiting by his precepts of wisdom. He preaches and writes for persons of a contrary genius, who are sensible of their spiritual infirmities, and willing to be taught and stirred up to their duty; who will pay due attention to the lessons of Wisdom, and make a serious use and application of them. Among all which qualifications our divine Philosopher most earnestly calls for diligence and attention. Full oft does he mingle his sacred Instructions with addresses to his hearers, to apply their hearts and encline their ears to the words of his mouth. *Keep my commandments and live, Prov. vii. and my law as the apple of thine eye: Bind them upon thy fingers; write them upon the table of thine heart. Say unto Wisdom, Thou art my sister, and call Understanding thy kinswoman.* Do

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‘ Do not easily absent your self from the school  
‘ of Wisdom. And when you are present in body,  
‘ do not be absent in mind; do not abandon your  
‘ self to drowsiness, nor give a loose to your  
‘ thoughts to wander after other matters; but be  
‘ as intent upon the duties of that place, as if you  
‘ were bargaining for a great estate, or receiving  
‘ a large sum of money, or eating and drinking  
‘ with a keen appetite: And by constant applica-  
‘ tion you will find that the oracles of Wisdom will  
‘ be engraven in your heart and incorporated with  
‘ your affections; they will appear in your esteem  
‘ as a rich treasure; they will be health to your  
‘ navel, and marrow to your bones. When Wis-  
‘ dom entreth into your heart, and Knowledge  
‘ grows pleasant to your soul, you will find that  
‘ they will revive and cheer you, when all out-  
‘ ward comforts fail you. You shall go about  
‘ your affairs in safety, and with a good courage,  
‘ as being sure that the providence of God watches  
‘ over you, and that his Word and Spirit direct  
‘ you, to avoid those temptations whereby others  
‘ are ensnared, and drawn into sin and danger.  
‘ When you lie down, you shall not be afraid:  
‘ Yea, you shall lie down, and your sleep shall be  
‘ sweet. When you retire from the labours of the  
‘ day to your rest at night, you shall review your  
‘ actions with pleasure and satisfaction, because you  
‘ have governed your self by the laws of Wisdom,  
‘ and have done nothing to offend God or trouble  
‘ your conscience. You shall not be afraid of sud-  
‘ den alarms, nor of the desolation of the wicked  
‘ when it cometh: For the Lord shall be your  
‘ confidence, and shall keep your foot from being  
‘ taken.’

BUT it may be demanded, Where were, or  
where are these schools of Wisdom, where diligent  
hearers may be instructed in the Laws of God and

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a good life? In answer to this, *Solomon* assures us, that there were such places in his Kingdom. For in the first Chapter of this Book, he says, *Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets, she crieth in the chief places of concourse, in the gates of the city she uttereth her words.* And in his viii chap. he appeals to all his people for the truth of this, saying, *Doth not wisdom cry, and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way, in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in of the doors.* And to go no farther than the ninth Chapter, it begins to the very same purpose. *Wisdom hath built her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars. She hath killed her beasts, she hath mingled her wine, she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens, she crieth upon the highest places of the city: Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.*

By all which expressions methinks *Solomon* doth as it were take us by the hand, and leads us round his Kingdom, and points out to us his Schools and Fountains of Learning, his Prophets and Priests, his Wisemen and Scribes, who were in every City, Town, and Village, where there was any number of People, ready to instruct them in the Laws of God, and the precepts of upright and virtuous living. I am sure the passages I have mentioned give us a lively idea of our own provisions of this kind. The wisdom which hath appeared amongst us, I mean our Christian Religion, is daily crying to us in innumerable places; in our houses, by the means of religious Books; in our Schools of Literature; but above all, in our Churches, which are the most constant and regular fountains of this wisdom.

FOR



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FOR tho' we should not be able to say, that in all our preaching the voice of Wisdom may be heard to the best advantage (tho' I hope and am perswaded, that office is no where so unhappily performed, but that a modest and well-disposed hearer may be the wiser and better for it) yet so much of the pure word of God is to be found in the rest of the publick Ordinances, that by a due attendance upon them a man cannot fail to become well instructed in the precepts of wisdom; and upon this account these places deserve to be called her Thrones, and to be honoured and frequented of all her children.

HE that makes it a matter of duty and conscience to worship God in his publick Ordinances upon his own day at least, if he cannot find other opportunities for it, will gradually enrich his mind, and enlarge his understanding with the best notions of the Majesty of God, and the Dignity of his own Soul; and his pleasure and satisfaction in such notions will daily encrease with them: *Whoso loveth the instructions of wisdom, will proportionably love the knowledge which results from them.*

THIS proposition is convertible thus: *Whoso is a sincere lover of knowledge, will be glad to receive those instructions which are necessary to bring him to it, whatever time and pains they may cost him.* The truth of this may be illustrated by various instances. It is well known that the rudiments of the most ingenious and pleasant Sciences, are in themselves harsh and tedious. But notwithstanding this, he that hath a strong passion for the science, let it be Musick, Astronomy, Navigation, &c. will undergo the fatigue of learning its rudiments, because he knows that without learning rules, and often practising them in imperfect essays, he can never attain to be master of his art. The case is the same in religious Matters; tho' they

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they were at first revealed to mankind by the dictates of the Spirit of God, yet those dictates and revelations must now be learned by the ordinary methods of reading and hearing them.

THE human Soul, in its infant state, is like a piece of fair paper; it comes into the world without any thing of the Law of God or man actually written upon it. It has no fountain of wisdom in it self, but only faculties to apprehend and learn it. And there must be a long course of education, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little must be instilled upon the mind, before it can be duly replenished both with the knowledge and the love of God and of his holy Laws.

AND when men are got above the classes of infancy and childhood in the School of Wisdom, yet they must never think themselves above the instructions of it. For whoever conceits himself master of so much knowledge as to have no farther occasion for the doctrines, the reproofs, the corrections, the exhortations of sacred Writ, certain it is that *such a man knows nothing yet as he ought to know*. He ought to know that he would lose the perfection of any art or science, by the disuse and neglect of it; and by breaking off his acquaintance with his friends, removing from his old habitation, changing his former ways and manners of life, he loses the pleasure which he once took in such conversations and customs. But be this as it will: Constancy in religious Communion is more necessary than in any human science or way of life, because it is the proper food of the Soul, whereby it is nourished unto every good word and work; and it is its only preservative against the temptations of the World and the lusts of the Flesh, which lie in wait to take it in a defenceless condition, and spoil it of its virtue. This case is aptly illustrated by the ancient parable of the

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the theatre of *Orpheus* the *Thracian* Poet, of whom it is fabled, That by his wonderful skill in music, he allured into his theatre all sorts of birds and beasts of prey, who forgetting their natural appetites and enmities to one another, stood sociably together, listening to the melody of his harp. But when the sound thereof ceased, or was drowned by some louder noise, presently these creatures fell into confusion and quarrels, till they were appeased by hearing it again. Such is the nature and condition of men, whose minds are disordered with various unsociable lusts and passions; which yet are kept in subjection, so long as they give ear to the counsels of Wisdom, to the exhortations of Religion, to the commands of good Laws and Magistrates. But if these instruments be once silent, or are over-born with the din of blasphemy, sedition or faction, wild passions break loose, and societies fall into anarchy and confusion.

I conclude therefore from the authority of my Text, and the resolutions of other wise men, and indeed from the voice of common sense and reason, that who so loveth not the instructions of any science, can never love the science it self, so well as to become master of it and to practise it. It is as absurd to pretend to it, as it is to desire the attainment of any end, without making use of the means which lead to it. It is to expect and hope for such science as the immediate gift of God, who is indeed able to give whatever he pleases, and can instantly infuse any sort of knowledge into the mind of man. But this he hath no where promised to do. On the contrary, he hath commanded us to study and take pains, to read, hear, and pray, and attend upon the ministry of his word for the acquiring of divine Wisdom. And we see by daily observation that such pains and method



thod of receiving instruction is the only way to purchase it. In order to make an estimate of the reason of this, let us state a comparison between the man who is regular in the duties of this place, and one who neglects them. Now it is very possible that the negligent man, by moderate pains in reading, and the benefit of conversation, may have a general knowledge of holy Scripture, and of the duties of a Christian life. But then this knowledge lies dormant in his mind, and does not operate in his words and actions. And indeed how can it? when by his neglects of the worship of God, he betrays his want of the first and fundamental principle of wisdom, which is, the fear of the Lord.

ON the other hand, the man who frequents God's house with that zeal and devotion which *Solomon* requires in his student of wisdom, is continually hearing those sacred Oracles which contain a true revelation of the divine Majesty, of his Will and Pleasure, of his Omniscience and Omnipotence in the government of the World, and of the rewards and punishments which he has prepared for mankind in a future state. By these Oracles his affections are excited to the love and fear of God, his memory is refreshed with the hearing of his duty, and his conscience is awakened with a sense of the importance of it. Briefly, the Spirit of God, which always accompanies the worthy use of his Ordinances, descends upon him, dwells in him, sanctifies and regenerates him, becomes his comforter and guide, and makes it his meat and drink to do the will of God.

IF no more were required of us, than to furnish our heads with religious Speculations, we might then soon take our leave of the schools of Wisdom. But all writers of Religion and Morality will tell us, that our duties consist not so much in

body

theory

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theory as practice. And how much we want to be instructed in the plainest duties of life, before we are ready and perfect in the practice of them; I shall show by one instance taken out of this xii chap. of *Proverbs*, concerning the government of the tongue. *There is, says he, one that speaketh like the piercings of a sword;* who outrages others, wounds their reputation, sows discord and division amongst neighbours. *The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord: but they that deal uprightly are his delight.* These rules are so reasonable, that every man, at first hearing, must approve of them. But how little does a meet approbation of them conduce to mend the faults here condemned? But when the offender hears them solemnly inculcated in the house of God, they fix in his memory, and strike his conscience with a fear of transgressing. The like good effects in abundance of other cases, are known to be wrought by the instructions of this place. He that loves these instructions, loves to be taught his duty, and to hear sin reprov'd, that he may see it, and avoid it.

LET but men accustom themselves to a regular attendance upon the publick Ordinances, and they will certainly find a much stronger influence of the divine Word upon their minds, than by a bare private reading of it. If they should think their attendance uneasy at first, yet the Spirit of Wisdom which here manifests itself, will conquer their aversion, and cause them to taste a sweet delight and comfort in this communion with God.

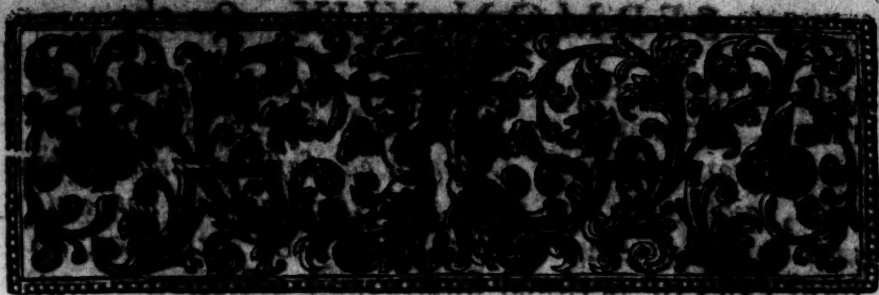
THE Fathers of our Church, who were persecuted for their Religion, complained of it as the worst of their sufferings, that they were deprived of the holy Scriptures, and denied the benefit of religious Assemblies. Let those who dishonour

God, and defraud their Souls of the bread of life, by refusing it when it is offered, consider what manner of Spirit they are of.

LET us hear what our blessed Lord said to his first Disciples, and in them to us, *Matth. xiii. 16, 17. Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear those things which many Prophets and Kings and righteous men have desired, but have not seen and heard.* Let us testify our sense of this blessing, by thankfully accepting it, and rejoicing in the enjoyment of it. And let us take all opportunities to honour his holy Name and his Word, who hath called us to this state of salvation, who hath provided the best means for our instruction, and who hath filled our land with the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea; even *Jesus Christ* our Lord, to whom &c.







# SERMON XLIX.

*On the Twenty-fourth Sunday after*  
TRINITY.



PROVERBS xiv. 13.

*Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and  
the end of that mirth is heaviness.*



L. L. Philosophers, I think, are agreed, that the faculty of laughing is peculiar to mankind, as flowing from a principle of reason which is wanting in other creatures. And so long as this faculty is exercised according to the Laws of good sense and reason, it is very commendable: For it was given us to sweeten conversation, to rectifie our easineis in the company of our friends, our kind acceptance of their entertainment, and the pleasure we take in their discourse and society. The Author of my Text, in his Book of *Ecclesiastes*, iii. 4. allows, that *there is a time to laugh as well as a time to weep.* The seasons for both are easily seen by persons of good discretion. In general we may say, that cheerful-

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ness is fittest for society, and sadness for retirement; according as our Lord directs in his rule of private fasting, *When thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast.* And this rule may be extended to most cases of personal sorrow and affliction.

LAUGHING is not only a natural sign of cheerfulness, but sometimes of scorn and indignation, of which there are proper objects and occasions. Our royal Preacher, who was too wise and pious to misrepresent the Divine Majesty, assures us, *Prov. iii. 34.* that *he scorneth the scorers*, those impious scoffers at religion and virtue, so often exclaimed against in this Book of *Proverbs*; and particularly threatned in those remarkable words, *I will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh.* Likewise holy *David*, in his second *Psalms*, observes, that when the Kings and Rulers of the earth conspire against the Lord and against his Christ, saying, ‘Let us break the bonds of  
‘their religion asunder, and cast away the cords  
‘of their Laws from us; *he that sitteth in Heaven shall laugh them to scorn, the Lord shall have them in derision.* Which expressions are used for our instruction, to excite us, by the authority and example of the most High, to treat all blasphemers of his name and scoffers at his worship, with the utmost contempt and indignation. In which treatment we are justified by his conduct who is infinitely good and gracious. *Surely*, says *Solomon*, *he scorneth the Scorers*, he hath no manner of tenderness or favour for them. And therefore while we esteem them as worthy of regard, we do in effect make ourselves more righteous than God, and become partakers of other men’s sins.

AND thus much briefly of the right uses of laughter: I now proceed to note the abuses of it, according to the direct purport of the words of my Text.

I. then;

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I. then; As we may exceed in any innocent pleasures and diversions, and thereby render them culpable, so may we in this : Which whenever it is excessive, it leaves a sorrowful heart, because it exhausts those animal spirits, which are the necessary life and support of it. This may be understood better by experience, than it can be by any verbal description. It is generally known that immoderate laughing causes a sinking of the heart, and a dejection of the Spirits, insomuch that some have expired in the very act. Therefore

II. LOUD, frequent, extravagant Laughter should be avoided, because it preys upon the vitals, it is the consumption of all true joy and peace ; it throws the affections into hurry and disorder, and renders a man incapable of solid and serious thinking ; instead of which, it puts him upon hunting after little jests and trifling matters, which may supply fewel to this abused faculty.

SOME there are who affect this perpetual exercise of their spleen in rallying and jesting, as fancying that it recommends them for persons of wit and good humour : But on the contrary, it certainly spoils their temper, and makes them difficult, peevish, and abusive in conversation. It betrays a weakness and giddiness of brain, which hath a great mixture of folly and madness in it.

FOR Fools and Madmen turn every thing into ridicule ; whereas wise men are always seasonable in their mirth, and exercise it only upon proper occasions. This is well observed by *Plato*, who reprehends the Poet *Homer* for making his Gods act out of character, when he represents them as setting up a loud laugh at *Vulcan's* halting ; an incident which should not have moved any man of dignity, much less was it worthy the notice of the Gods.



III. THIS kind of mirth is the prize of Libertines; they find it in every lust which they pursue. But they say it is not to be found in religion; and they say very true: Religion is a stranger to such delusive joy; which only serves to colour vice, to conceal its poison with a false relish, to give the reputation of enjoyments to the pomps and pleasures of this vain world.

THIS is a warrantable meaning of my Text, and to make it out the plainer, some connect it with the foregoing verse. *There is a way, says he, which seems right to a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.* And why does it seem right? but because it is bestrowed with the flowers of these false joys. Eating and drinking, musick and singing, dancing and laughing, are the common Sirens which allure poor unwary sinners into these ways, and devour them when they have done. They devour their time and pains, their health and strength, their reputation and good conscience, their virtue and courage. Their fair faces at last turn into foul monsters, and all their endearments are found to be but so many nets and snares, thrown out to captivate silly hearts, and to drag them to destruction. *Their ways in the end prove to be the ways of death.*

SOLOMON hath set forth the emptiness of these joys by a just comparison: *The Laughter of fools, i. e. wicked men, is like the crackling of thorns under a pot, loud, sudden, and transient; after a glaring blaze, nothing remains but coldness and darkness.* And this the poor Fool sees, whenever he has the smallest glimmering of reason to shew him the true state of his mind. Let a man who has spent fifty or sixty years, in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, take the benefit of such an enlightening, and descend into his own heart, and see what stock of joy he has laid up there for old

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age, from all the Feasts, Shows, theatrical Entertainments, amusements and diversions which have fallen to his share thro' the course of his life. What report will he make, after all his experience? perhaps none at all; perhaps one in favour of such delights. But will you hear the sentence of one who had tried them, and was capable of passing a true judgment upon them? It is our royal Preacher, who pronounces of them more than once, that *they are all vanity and vexation of spirit.*

HE tells us, *Eccles. ii.* that after other searches for present happiness, he resolved to try if he could find it in mirth; and that this afforded nothing but disappointment. *I said of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, what doth it?* The noise, the tumult, the indecent motions and scurrilous jestings of men who give a loose to excessive laughter, appeared to me like distraction of mind: and considering how pernicious it is, I could not but reject it with a passionate disdain; saying of all the branches of fashionable mirth and diversions, what is there in them, that so strangely bewitches men? What enchantment have they which so intoxicates mortals, that they think not of God, nor of any thing that is serious, but are wholly intent upon the pursuit of these unprofitable, these hurtful amusements?

SUCH was Solomon's experimental judgment of those things which the World calls pleasures and enjoyments. Whence I conclude, that if a superannuated Epicure, who has lost the taste of them, does not give them the same character, he does not speak impartially. If he laughs and seems to rejoyce at the mention of them, his heart contradicts his tongue, for *it is in the gall of bitterness, and the bonds of iniquity.*

AND this leads us to observe,

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IV. THAT laughter is often abused to skreen an evil conscience, or to set a good face upon a bad matter. And this is the common artifice of malefactors : they drink and revel and laugh, as if they were all joy and innocence within ; when at the same time their conscience presents them with the Tribunal, the Accusers, the Judge, and the Executioner. The Hypocrite, who serves the Prince of darkness with his dissimulation, that he may seduce others to do things really sinful, or at least to suffer the frauds and cheats which he desires to pass upon them, he composes the air of his face and his whole carriage to personate even an Angel of light, appearing to be very cheerful and good-humoured, as having nothing but upright intentions in his heart ; when alas ! this serenity is but the forerunner of a tempest, and this mirth must end in the mourning of the deluded sufferer.

THIS is the melancholy state of our World, that the glories and rejoycings of one part are founded in the desolation and ruin of another great part of mankind. Such are the triumphs of great Conquerors, the treasures of Oppressors, the sweet morsels of robbers and fraudulent dealers ; they are the spoils, the blood, the tears of those unhappy wretches, who by violence or circumvention have been destroyed, enslaved, and reduced to a helpless, starving condition.

V. THAT part of laughter which consists in scorn and derision, how commonly is it imployed to the abuse of all that is good ? I have observed before, that there are in the World some men and their actions which justly deserve to be scorned and derided. But I must now complain that the reproach which is due to these, is, by a monstrous perversion, poured out upon God, Religion, and Virtue : Which when profligate men ridicule



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dicule and hiss out of the World, what must such a generation of vipers expect? and what can be the end of such mirth?

WE have heard of the Fall of Angels, and we know that their enmity to God made them Reprobates. I have read many things which they are reported to have said. But I never found any language of Hell comparable to that which now flows from the tongues and pens of our impious race. Surely the lot is fallen upon Atheistical Christians to fill up the measure of the infernal blasphemies, and hasten the consummation of the Divine Vengeance. The very Devils believe there is a God, and tremble at those things which our Infidels commit in sport and gayety. To what depth of misery must such a load of provocations sink our Globe? What a tragical conclusion had the jollity of the old World? No methods of Divine Grace could melt them into tears of repentance; but hardily they persisted in sinning, till all nature about them wept such a deluge as swept them (as they deserved) from the face of the Earth.

AND in this World of ours, how often and how loudly has God called from Heaven (enough to make the deaf to hear) that if Scorners will not leave off their scoffing at religion, he will turn their mirth into mourning, and their joy into heaviness? Yet how does the number of such scoffers encrease; and what are they bringing upon us but the execution of threatned judgments?

*Lastly*, It is not good for man to indulge mirth and jollity, because the excess of such pleasures always turns to the greatest pain. Concerning which we have many excellent admonitions both in divine and human writings. 'Have you found honey, says *Solomon*? eat not so much as to surfeit of it; for then it will turn into the bitterest gall.

gall. Have you found riches? Set not your heart upon them: for many times they get wings, and fly away from their owners, and leave them in that poverty which they dreaded above all other conditions. But if they should abide by you, yet even so they may prove your bane: they may supply you with the fuel of many pernicious lusts: and if you take them into your bosom, they will sting you like a serpent with endless cares and fears. Have you found good wine, with agreeable company? Be not too fond of it; nor drink it to excess, lest it divest you of the man, and transform you into a brute. For who hath wo? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine, and delight in the society of riotous livers.

Now the design of all this, is to perswade us to be moderate in all conditions; and when we are masters of good things, not to let them become masters of us. When fortune runs high on our side, not to be over-much exalted, but reckon that it will change: When it is against us, not to despair, but live in hopes that it will come fair again. *In the day of prosperity, says Solomon, be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God hath set the one over-against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.*

WHEN we are in prosperity, let us enjoy God's blessings cheerfully and with thankful hearts; but so soberly as not to forget that afflictions will take their turn; which whenever they come, let us take them patiently, considering that they may change for the better. For as both good and evil come from God, so hath he balanced them with such exactness, that the most distressed wants not proportionable comforts, nor may the happiest fan-

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fancy himself more than man. In short, we cannot invent a way to dispose things better than God hath done.

*SOCRATES*, in *Plato's Phædo*, says, it would have served *Æsop* for a good subject of a Fable, to have represented how Pleasure and Pain contended before *Jupiter*, which should be chief among men; and that the God not being able to decide their quarrel, sent them into the World like two twins joyned together at the head; so that whoever had the one, should be sure to have the other. And this is so constantly the course of Providence, that both history and our own experience will satisfy us, that it is verified in every condition of Life.

*PAIN* certainly gives the greatest relish to pleasures. Thus rest is most pleasant after travel and labour, health after sickness, and food to a stomach which is well whetted with hunger. And it is natural for us to value those things most, which have cost us much study and watching, and put us to hazards and hardships for the obtaining of them.

For these reasons, *Solomon* hath said several things, which sound like paradoxes at first hearing, but upon examination will be found to be the soundest rules of comfortable living. *It is better*, says he, *to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting*; to converse with things that will make us serious, oftener than with those that are the subjects of levity and jesting. For in the midst of such festivity, we are apt to forget ourselves and grow dissolute: But a spectacle of mortality inclines us to be considerate, and disposes our minds to humility and meekness, sobriety and charity; when, in our deceased friend, we see the common fate of all men, and follow him to his Grave, who but a little before was perhaps as strong



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strong and likely to live as ourselves. This shows us how quickly all our sensual joys must expire, and warns us, if we would be happy, so to live, that death, which is justly dreadful to the wicked, may be welcome to us, as being the Gate thro' which we escape from all our troubles into eternal rest.

AND therefore Solomon concludes, that *Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better*: Which may be understood of sadness either in ourselves or others; by seeing it in others, we are affected with it ourselves, and while it impairs the looks, it improves the mind.

THE heart of the wise, proceeds he, *is in the house of mourning, while the heart of fools is in the house of mirth*. The one is contemplating the vanity of all worldly enjoyments, while the other seeks all opportunities to avoid such contemplations, and to put them out of his head. But it is better to hear the rebuke of wise men, than the song of fools. He that will be wise, must converse with the wise and virtuous, and be content to hear their reproofs; which tho' they may sound harsh at the first, yet are they infinitely preferable to the smooth praises and commendations of men of a contrary character; nay they ought to be more acceptable, than the most delicious musick, songs, and jests of all the merry companions in the World.

OUR royal Preacher had no intention to forbid men the lawful and innocent pleasures of life: he only studies how to make them real pleasures, by limiting them within the bounds of innocence, and regulating them by the fear of God and a good conscience. *Make, says he, thy ways and works acceptable to God in the first place, and then eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry*

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*merry heart. And that he may be sure to be understood, he repeats and inculcates this over and over again. Every man, says he, Eccles. v. 19. to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoyce in his labour, this is the gift of God. It is good and comely for a man to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he takes under the Sun, all the days of his life which God giveth him. But how shall he enjoy it? Not by breaking thro' the Laws of religion and virtue, not by pampering his lusts, or setting his heart upon riches or honours; but by living in the fear of God, and exercising beneficence towards all men. Let him be very thankful to God for all his gifts, and very glad to imploy them to his glory, and the comfort of his poor fellow-creatures, and then he will not think life tedious or irksome; he will not want to drown his thoughts and stupifie his conscience with pleasures and amusements: But he will pass his time most agreeably, because it is his meat and drink to do good; and God hath given him his heart's desire, in that inward tranquillity of mind, that joy and gladness of heart, which the World can neither give him, nor take from him.*

*SOLOMON* advises the man who would attain to this cheerful and contented Spirit, to manage his affairs with diligence and prudence, and then not to disturb himself with anxious concern about the issues of things, but to leave such cares to God who is the merciful and gracious Protector of all those that put their trust in him. Let him not build too much upon outward prosperity, but always remember, that as the fairest Sun that ever shone will set, and the night will follow it; so a life blest with all the satisfactions of this World, must have an end. Let him communicate

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communicate with his neighbours, according to his ability, in acts of hospitality and friendship: and let him believe, that nothing is more profitable (tho' the World thinks otherwise) than to be kind and charitable to poor, miserable people, tho' perhaps they are not so good as they should be, but will unthankfully forget the benefits they have received; at least, are never likely to make any return, no more than the sea, or the sand upon the sea-shore could produce a harvest for the seed sown upon it. Yet, says he, *cast thy bread upon these waters, for after many days thou shalt find it again.* Let not the probable loss of it, discourage you from dispensing it, for God can requite you for it both in this and the next World; he has promised to do it in both; and there may come a time when some of those poor people who have been relieved by you, may do you good service.

AND by exercising the offices of mercy and loving-kindness, gentleness, patience, and meekness, you will not fail to obtain the Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of love, joy, and peace, whose fruits they are. And indeed, the influence and communion of the blessed Spirit, is the only fountain of all true joy. In the cheerfulness that results from it, there is no mixture of sorrow, the mirth of it never ends in heaviness. The unction or infusion of it, is styled, *the oil of joy and gladness.* This is that Heavenly Comforter which Christ promised to send down upon his Disciples; and they fully experienced the truth of his promise. For he filled them with such consolations, such faith, hope, and courage, that they not only took joyfully the spoiling of their goods for Christ's name, but they smiled upon the rack, they sang Psalms in the fire, they were all light within, they constantly triumphed over all the powers of darkness.

By



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BY virtue of this Spirit, *St. Paul* assures us, that *we shall rejoyce evermore*: For he beareth witness with our Spirit that we are the children of God: by which inward testimony we are sealed unto the day of redemption, and rejoyce in hope of approaching glory.

LET us then take care to keep that good conscience which *Solomon* tells us is a continual feast, which fortifies the mind against misfortunes, which places our treasure and security within the vail of God's blessing, under the light of his countenance. An honest, clean heart is a kind of heavenly companion upon earth. It renders a man fearless in dangers, steady in tumults, cheerful in afflictions, meek and composed under those accidents which commonly disorder other men. The Spirit of the World is rude and extravagant in all its passions; but that from Heaven is modest, venerable, serene, and always quiet in its station.

LET us then pray, that this good Spirit may reign in our hearts, and banish from thence all noisom lusts, and vitious affections, that no voice blaspheming God or outraging men may be heard among us; but that religion and virtue, meekness and mercy may dwell in our habitations; which will fit and prepare us for that Jubilee of joy and those immortal pleasures which fill the Kingdom of the God of peace and love, thro' the merits of *Jesus Christ* our Lord &c.



S E R-



# S E R M O N L.

On the Twenty-fifth Sunday after  
T R I N I T Y.



PROVERBS xvi. 21.

*The wise in heart shall be called prudent;  
and the sweetness of the lips encreaseth  
learning.*



**W**HICH words not carrying a very obvious and determinate sense, we will consider them in a threefold view. *First,* As they are an assertion that true Wisdom will shew it self in a prudent conduct of life. *Secondly,* As they offer a comparison between Wisdom and Eloquence. *Thirdly,* As they intimate a rule of profitable teaching.

And *First,* The wise in heart shall be called prudent; his wisdom will gain him the reputation of a discreet, serious, and sensible man. I will not be tedious in shewing the distinctions between Wisdom and Prudence, but shall just observe, that Wisdom is the mother of intellectual, and Prudence of practical virtues: The first resides in the mind,  
and

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the other exerts it self in the manners and actions of men.

It may be said, that Wisdom may be separated from Prudence; or in other words, that knowing and doing are two things. Which I readily grant: We hear it complained of, in the writings of all teachers of Religion and Virtue, and we cannot avoid seeing examples of it every day. But this is no good argument against the assertion of my Text, that the wise in heart will be a man of prudent conduct. This exception lies against the head, not the heart: And we must confess, that there are many men in the world who have wise heads and foolish hearts. Men of good capacities, clear understandings, well improved by reading and observation; but after all, they have some odd humour, fond opinion, beloved lust, which hinders them from living according to their knowledge.

SUCH wise men as these, *Solomon* puts into the catalogue of his Fools, because they have the means of doing well in their power, but make no use of them. In this catalogue are various ranks and classes of scorners, proud, froward, wise in their own conceit, haters of discipline and reproof; men of superior craft and subtilty, able to out-wit and cheat a great part of the world. But *Solomon* comprehends them all under one common denomination of Fools, because they are vitious, and apply their wit to mischievous purposes: Which a truly wise man will not be guilty of. For *the wisdom of the prudent*, says he, *is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit.* The former is careful to enter upon good ways, and walk uprightly in them. He chuses honest ends, and takes lawful methods to attain them. He is sagacious in spying inconveniencies, and as quick-sighted to his interests; but neither the one nor the other can



tempt him out of those bounds which piety and virtue have prescribed for the rules of his actions. On the contrary a false and counterfeit wisdom is wholly made up of fallacies and cunning devices. *The folly of fools is deceit*; their sense, learning, reasonings, and vivacity of wit serve but to heighten their folly, to sweeten their delusions, and confirm them in their errors.

THIS is the case, where Wisdom rests only in the head: But when it descends to the heart, and warms the affections with the love of that which is good, it fails not to bless the world with a truly valuable and useful man. For *not the wise in head, but the wise in heart shall be called prudent.* 'When Wisdom entreth into thy heart, says our Preacher, ii. 10. and Knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul: Discretion shall preserve thee; Understanding shall keep thee.' When you can find a pleasure and satisfaction in the laws of piety and virtue, this will unite you to them, so that you will not be able to depart from them. Your own experience will teach you, that it is your best policy to walk in those plain ways; and that no men understand their own interest so well, as they that cannot be perswaded by any temptations to deviate from them.

FOR these reasons Solomon earnestly exhorts the candidate of Wisdom to apply his heart to the study of it. *My son, says he, give me thine heart. Upon the table of thine heart write mine instructions; keep them and lay them up as a treasure in the midst of it. The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall, i. e.* He that is truly wise, differs from a conceited talkative man in this, that he thankfully receives good advice, and avoids the dangers of which he is admonished. To such wise men he promises, that they shall inherit glory, while shame shall be the promotion of fools.

Such

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Such fools shall be servants to the wise in heart. They may for a time make their way in the world by an ostentation of parts and abilities : But he who governs himself by the rules of true Wisdom, shall at last become their master, and far outshine them in reputation and authority. The wise in heart shall be called prudent, when those that serve themselves of dishonest and fraudulent arts, shall have the reproach and infamy which they deserve.

THEREFORE keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Out of the abundance of your thoughts and affections you will of necessity both speak and act. Consequently your heart is the fountain of all your words and actions, the seed-plot of those fruits which appear in your life and conversation. Let but Wisdom govern in your heart, and then the fruits of your life can never be amiss.

Secondly, My Text affords us an occasion to compare Wisdom and Eloquence together. *The wise in heart shall be called prudent, and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.* Which may be thus paraphrased. ' He whose mind is furnished  
' with all necessary maxims of Wisdom, will just-  
' ly merit esteem for his prudent counsels: But it  
' he have the powerful charms of Eloquence also,  
' to convey his sentiments delightfully to others,  
' it will add a greater value to his Wisdom, and  
' render him the fitter for any publick office, es-  
' pecially for that of discourse and teaching :  
' when his just way of thinking is accompanied  
' with proper elocution and a ready utterance.'

THE Preacher, says Solomon of himself, *sought to find out acceptable words. He gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many Proverbs.* Tho' he was endued with incomparable Wisdom by the special gift of God; yet did not this illumination

cause him to neglect human studies and means of improvement; but he readily listened to all men of any good sense and experience, and having weighed what they said, committed their most notable sayings to writing, for the benefit and instruction of all ages. Nothing did he write that was frivolous or trifling, but maxims of the most solid Wisdom, of the most serious and general Concernment.

IN several other places doth he testify his approbation, not only of the subject matter, but ornaments of speech. As presently after my Text: *Pleasant words are like a honey-comb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.* When the Speaker is not only substantial but delightful in his discourse, he is as welcome to his hearers as honey to the taste, or health after sickness. And again, xxv. 11. *A word fitly spoken, says he, is like apples of gold in pictures of silver;* or, to make this comparison more intelligible, it is like a handsome present of gold or jewels, offered in the finest purse or casket, in the most obliging and acceptable manner.

IT cannot be doubted but that Wisdom and Eloquence united together, are very desirable talents in a Legislator, Governor, or Teacher of Religion. However, there have been some excellent persons of this sort, whom nature did not endue with the latter of these gifts. *Moses*, for instance, admirable for his Wisdom and Learning of all sorts, yet by his own confession was no good Speaker, but *slow of speech*, and of a faltering tongue. The *Jews* think he had some impediment of lisping or stammering: The *LXX Greek Interpreters* understand the words, *slow of speech*, as if he had but a weak, small, slender voice. *St. Stephen* says that *Moses* was *mighty in words* as well as in deeds; which is no contradiction to the fore-mentioned Text, *Exod. iv. 10.* if we understand



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it of his writings, which are weighty and eloquent, full of pathetick discourses, and well-composed speeches: Wherein it appears, that whatever defects *Moses* had in his pronounciation, he had none in his compositions, but has adorned his writings with all the flowers of Rhetorick and arts of Perswasion. And I am very inclinable to their opinion who think, that either by the special help of God, or uncommon care and diligence, *Moses* in time corrected the natural impediment of his speech, as was done many hundred years after in Greece, by their most famous Orator *Demosthenes*.

BUT whatever imperfection of this kind *Moses* laboured under, it did not hinder him from discharging the part, both of an excellent Legislator and a Judge. In the exercise of which offices there is no need of eloquence; but of a quick apprehension, exact judgment, and proper language; which *Moses* never wanted.

MUCH the same things which have been said of *Moses*, the Prophet *Jeremiah* and the Apostle *St. Paul* have recorded of themselves, that they had not the compleat faculty of elocution; whether it was by reason of some natural defect in the organs of speech; or from some accidental hurt or infirmity, is unknown. But this is certain, that thro' the abundance of their Wisdom, their preaching was of signal service to the Church of God; as likewise their writings have been and will be throughout all generations.

AS to phrase and manner of expression, the most ancient Law-givers and Philosophers of any Nation or Republick that we have heard of, have chose to deliver their Laws and politick Maxims in short sentences and pleasant parables, rather than in elaborate and copious orations. This is the style of the holy Decalogue, of the Wisdom of *Solomon*, of the twelve Tables of the *Romans*;

of the Laws of *Athens* and *Lacedæmon*, short and plain, comprehending a great deal of sense in a few words.

EVERY body sees that this is the best style for the grand maxims of Religion and Government, which would be of little use, were they not penned with such perspicuity and brevity, as that the common people might easily understand them, and retain them in memory. Of such a style I suppose *Solomon* speaks, *Ecclesiast.* xii. 11. when he says, *The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies.* There is the like power in their acute sayings to stir up the minds of men to the practice of Religion and Virtue, as there is in a goad to prick the dull ox forward to draw the plough; and they are as apt to stick in the memory, as nails do when driven into a board, and to collect the thoughts, affections, and resolutions, into one certain point.

WE read of the ancient *Romans*, that they were for a long time tenacious of this brief and comprehensive kind of literature, and very loath to admit of the more diffusive and artful elocution of the *Greeks* to break in upon it. *Tully*, *Plutarch*, and others report, that in the time of *Cato* the Elder, when the *Roman* Common-wealth was in a flourishing condition, the *Athenians* having some business with their Senate, transacted it by the embassy of three learned Orators, viz. *Carneades* the Academick, *Diogenes* the Stoick, and *Critolaus* the Peripatetick. The gracefulness of *Carneades* his Oratory, filled, like a sudden wind, all the City with the sound of it. One day discoursing before *Galba* and *Cato*, he made a noble panegyrick in praise of Justice. The day following he took the contrary side, and confuted all the arguments which he had alledged before. This, I say, soon filled the City with his fame, that a *Grecian* was

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*was arrived who could defend any cause, and perswade men to what he pleased.* His fame soon brought the young *Romans* about him; whom he so captivated with his Rhetorick, that they left all other diversions to hear, and admire, and learn his art. Nor were their parents generally displeased with it. But *Cato*, fearing lest youth should so apply themselves to the art of speaking, as to prefer it before action and military glory, moved the Senate to dispatch the business of these Embassadors, and send them home to their own schools, to declaim to the *Grecian* children, rather than corrupt the *Romans*, whom they could perswade to any thing, to forsake their ancient Laws and Customs.

THIS faculty of perswading to any thing, and of setting a good face upon a bad matter, is the reason, I suppose, why *Plato* compares Rhetorick to Tyranny, and would no more endure such Orators than Poets in his Common-wealth. And it is a great justification of the order of my Text, where *the sweetness of the lips*, or eloquence, is put after *the wise in heart*; intimating that Eloquence should evermore be under the direction of Wisdom. Whenever it is not so directed, it is of most pernicious consequence both in Religion and civil Government. There is no Heresie or other error in Religion, but what has prevailed, and gained acceptance by abused Eloquence. And by the same means some of the greatest duties of Christianity have been neglected and laid aside. If a man be admired for his learning and close reasoning, whether he be Ecclesiastick or Laick, Writer or Speaker, he commonly becomes the Oracle of his admirers so far, that from him they take the measure of their religious Principles, even contrary to the plain letter of the sacred Text. And it will be impossible to perswade them



that Salvation is to be obtained by Christ alone; or that there is any thing in the communion of Saints, the unity of Faith, uniformity of Worship, and a great many more Christian Doctrines and Duties, if their Oracles insinuate any thing against them, or do but forbear to recommend them.

ELOQUENCE in the Law is no less detrimental to common Justice, when it is not under the direction of Wisdom. When the enacting part of a Statute is tedious and intricate, it leaves abundant room for contention and strife. And how often hath a torrent of Eloquence at the Bar run down a righteous Cause; especially when it hath been in favour of the rich against the poor, the noble against the vulgar, or any one that is magnified against a despised party.

I say therefore, that Eloquence when separated from Wisdom, is very destructive to Church and State; but serviceable to both when it is in the mouth of wise men; of men fearing God, careful to observe his Law; studious to know their Duty, and conscientious in the discharge of it: Which I am sure is the character of that wise man whom *Solomon* would form by his writings. An eloquent tongue and sweetness of lips in such a man, is certainly a great help to his Wisdom, to render it useful and instructive. And this brings us in the

THIRD place, to observe from my Text the most effectual method both of teaching and learning our duty.

In which, says *Solomon*, the principal thing is *Wisdom*; therefore labour after that in the first place, *Prov. iv. 7*. Let us set God always before us, as the *Psalmist* speaks; let us have his Glory and Service constantly in view, and zealously endeavour to make his ways known upon Earth,  
and

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and his saving health among all People. Let us account it our greatest honour to be Chiefs in the cause of God, to signalize our selves under his banner against Sin, the World, and the Devil: To build up his Church, to enlarge his Kingdom, to exalt his Throne in the hearts of the children of men; to make his Image visible in the World, by walking in it as his children, causing our light to shine before men, in patterns of Holiness and good Works, that many may be turned from darkness to this light, and be rescued from the tyranny of *Satan*, into this glorious liberty.

IN order to this, let us study to know our selves, and to see what faculties and talents God hath bestowed upon us, and by daily use and exercise to improve them, and add both to their weight and number. By diligent hearing, reading, and meditating, let us furnish our minds with the Doctrines and Precepts of Wisdom, and conceive worthy notions of the divine Majesty and his heavenly Kingdom; and communicate them to others by suitable discourse and conversation upon proper occasions.

If we would but accustom our selves to meditate on these things so as to see their Dignity and Importance, to take delight in them, and to converse about them with that seriousness, reverence, and good method, which alone can make such conversations profitable, we should soon get above our smattering knowledge, and narrow, cold conceptions of them. For such improvements in true Wisdom we have opportunities and means in abundance, and want nothing but inclinations and proper methods to make a right use of them.

THE blessed Author and Finisher of our Faith, was the most accomplished Teacher that ever came into

into the World, both for his Wisdom and his Eloquence. And while others were celebrated for wise men, he was styled, *The Wisdom of God*, as containing in himself all the treasures of divine Wisdom. While others were partakers of the gifts and graces of the holy Spirit, he had the fulness of it, without any stint or measure. *He is that light that shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.* He knew the everlasting Father, not by such Visions and Oracles as revealed him to the Prophets, but he was with him from all Eternity, and came into this World to make known those things which he had seen and heard in the divine Presence and Bosom and inmost Counsels. Hence he testifyeth, that *no man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him.* In him was fulfilled that of *Psalms lxxviii. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world:* Which he taught with such unusual power and energy, that his hearers were often astonished, and asked, *Whence hath this man this wisdom?*

HIS Prudence was far superior to the craft and contrivance of his enemies, as appears by his answers to their captious questions about the Resurrection, the paying of tribute to the *Romans*, and several other matters; as well as by his conduct which he used to escape the plots which they laid for him, to apprehend him and take away his life.

THE like Prudence he recommends to his Disciples, saying, *Be wise as serpents.* 'Beware of wicked men; expect that they will prove to you like so many wolves and foxes to a flock of sheep: Take care, as much as you fairly can, to avoid their snares; and when they persecute you in one City, flee to another.'



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TOGETHER with this superlative Wisdom and Prudence, our Lord had certainly all external advantages of an eloquent Speaker: Which were foreseen by those Prophets who spoke of his coming into the World. The Author of the *xlv Psalm* says, *Full of grace are thy lips, because God hath blessed thee for ever*, or endued thee throughout with all the most excellent faculties both of body and mind. Agreeably to this Prophecy of Christ we read, *Luke iv.* that when he first began to preach in the Synagogue at *Nazareth*, the whole assembly wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. *St. Matthew* says, at the close of his Sermon in the Mount, that the People were astonished at his Doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes. *St. Luke* says, *xi. 27.* that on a certain day, as he was preaching to the people, a woman of the assembly cry'd out, in transport at the Eloquence of his discourse, *Blessed is the womb which bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.* Lastly, We learn from *John vii.* that at the feast of Tabernacles, Jesus went into the Temple, and preached so powerfully, that many acknowledged him to be the *Messiah*. Whereupon the Pharisees and Chief-Priests sent Officers to arrest him. Who after they had stood and heard him out, returned without him; and when their Masters demanded the reason why they had not brought him, their answer was, *Never man spake like this man*; which was a fair confession that they were so charmed with his Eloquence, that they had no power to lay hands on him.

FROM all these passages it appears, that our Lord was a most accomplished Teacher, being endued with the greatest Wisdom, Prudence, and faculties of good Elocution.

THE same gifts he promised to bestow upon his Apostles, for the very same end and purpose. When he ordained them to preach the Gospel, he bid them consider themselves as the lights of the world, who were to teach men both by their preaching and example, and assured them he would give them a mouth and wisdom, which all their adversaries should not be able to gain-say nor resist. For the fulfilling of this promise, when the Holy Ghost was sent down upon them at Pentecost, it lighted on them in the shape of cloven tongues, as a proper symbol of this power. And their preaching, with the effects of it, fully confirmed it.

THE same holy Spirit is still in the Church: And tho' the miraculous virtues of it, not being now so necessary, are in a great measure ceased, yet let not our diligent endeavours cease, and then we shall not fail to attain such a portion of his graces as shall be sufficient for all the ends and purposes of our Religion. For tho' both the sons of David, the author of my Text, and the author of our Faith, had Wisdom by the special gift of God, yet they were not wanting in their diligent studies, and daily exercise and improvement of it. To teach us, that no such supernatural illuminations are to be depended upon, as shall supersede human care and industry. But he that seeks after Wisdom, by his prayers to God, and his reading and hearing of his holy Word, and honest application of it in the ordering of his life, shall not seek in vain. Tho' his Wisdom at first might seem no more than a grain of mustard-seed, yet by a diligent cultivation it will wonderfully increase, and bring forth abundance of good fruit; according to the manifold promises of our Lord to those who do his will, and pray, and live, and improve their talents as he has directed. To him  
*Ec.*



# S E R M O N L I

*On the Twenty-sixth Sunday after*

TRINITY.



PROVERBS, XIX. 5.

*A false witness shall not be unpunished: and  
he that speaketh lies shall not escape.*

**I**N which words, a brief and general sentence of condemnation is passed upon two sorts of faithless wretches. I. Upon one, who at the tryal of a cause in a Court of Judicature, gives in a wrong evidence, to the subverting of Justice and Judgment. II. Upon him who in his ordinary conversation accustoms his tongue to swearing and lying; who makes no conscience of keeping his word; who roundly affirms those things for truth, which he knows to be false, or easily takes up injurious reports from others like himself, and spreads them abroad, when he knows he hath no good ground or foundation for them. Both these offenders against truth and justice are here



here threatned with deserved punishment. Which sometimes is visible, in the body and estate; sometimes invisible, in the mind and conscience: sometimes it seizes immediately upon the offender; at other times it pursues him slowly, but yet certainly overtakes him at last, and exacts of him the pains of his falshood and wrong.

I say, these workers of iniquity are always punished one way or other: but it is highly necessary to good government, and essential to the very being of society, that they should often suffer speedy and open correction: that thereby they may deter others from destroying that faith and truth which is the life of cities and societies. For what are societies but a mixture of wolves and sheep, whereof the one sort would quickly devour the other, if they were not restrained by good Laws? And what would Laws signifie, if the execution of them should be commonly perverted and defeated by the lying tongues of false witnesses?

I believe there is nothing more frequently inculcated, from the beginning to the end of holy Scripture, than the practice of truth, justice, and righteousness; and nothing more declaimed against than the contrary vices. Than which there cannot be a greater demonstration, that these writings are the word of God. For God, the fountain of all our good things, is the Father of truth: and the Devil, the author of all that is deadly, is the Father of lies. By a lye, a false pretence of improving our felicity, he robbed us of it, and subjected us to his own empire, the tyrannical dominion of Sin and Death. And by the like delusions he still continues to reign over us. By lies he tempts men to be Atheists and Idolaters, to be vain and voluptuous, to commit murders, adulteries and robberies; in short, to break the whole  
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Law of God; perswading them that in these excesses they will find exquisite delight and pleasure, whereas at the same time they plunge themselves into the depths of misery. And this we must say of all the Devil's Temptations, if we well consider them, that they are but so many lies, contrived to cheat us with false appearances, and seduce us from our real good.

WITH the greatest reason therefore it is, that the Commandments of God are called Truth, because in keeping of them lye our truest advantages and everlasting comforts. The observance of them is the only means of our prosperity and safety even in the present state. When *David* says, *Psalms* xix. 'The Statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoyce the heart; the Commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, and endureth for ever: the Judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether; and in keeping of them there is great reward;' this is far from being a folly of wit, or enthusiastick rapture. The common suffrage of all generations says the same, from the creation of the world to this day.

Do we read in the sacred Oracles, penned near three thousand years ago, that a false balance, unjust measures, lying lips, pride, cruelty, a froward heart, a spirit of dissension, malice and revenge, are all abominable to God? We see the reason at this day, why they must always be detested by him who is the most gracious Maker and Preserver of mankind, because they are inconsistent with the being of any civil government. There is no Magistrate who presides over any country, city, or little borough, who can be of any service to it, if he does not take care to punish such evil-doers, and to protect and encourage those that do well.

FOR

FOR 1. Fraud in commerce and dealing, is but a species of robbery: 'tis the mother of unjust gain, which enriches a few with the spoils and damage of the community. Nor do those riches continue long in the families of the unrighteous possessors, but moulder away, according to the remarks of our royal Preacher, that *treasures of wickedness profit not; that wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished; that the posterity of robbers shall starve*: 2. Haughtiness of spirit, how does it swell a man with an overweening opinion of himself? making him despise others as below his notice; and consequently unfits him for those offices of meekness, courtesie, and humanity, which make society agreeable and easie. 3. No less unfociable is a tongue addicted to calumny, tale-bearing, detraction, supplied with a heart which is always devising wicked imaginations, studying how by fraud or force to gratifie some desire or lust, covetousness or revenge; loving to make the dearest friends fall out, and taking pleasure to see those people at variance; who should be most closely united in brotherly affection.

Now it is impossible for men of these dispositions not to meet with their punishment in their own mischievous ways. The makers and venders of slight manufactures, and adulterated goods, which prove much worse in the using, than what they were pretended to be, must quickly be found out, and lose their business, esteem, and reputation with that part of mankind whom they have imposed upon. Likewise slanderers, false accusers, covenant-breakers, who shuffle off their promises, and find tricks to evade those obligations which they lye under, and do not care to perform, must needs incur that detestation, shame and reproach which always did and always will attend such dealings. Such lying lips are odious to God  
and



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and men, which surely is no small punishment. They are continually violating that faith and truth which are the necessary bonds of good government; the best and strongest guards for the security of any throne; which must needs sink and come to nothing, when these foundations fail, upon which it is established.

WHEN the holy Scriptures describe the administration of that Prince who was to make all nations of the earth blessed, they say, *Isa. xi. 4.* that *he shall judge the poor with righteousness, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: that righteousness shall be the girdle of his loyns, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.* Consequently the putting off these girdles, is the dissolution of Government.

AND thus much of the violation of truth in general. I come now to speak of that enormous and foul breach of it, committed by Witnesses in Courts of Judicature, who when called to give a fair impartial evidence in any cause, are faulty in the delivery of it.

IN the tryal of causes, since the party accused cannot be permitted to clear himself by his own testimony, he must be convicted or cleared by the testimony of others who are of his acquaintance, or privy at least to the affair in question. And such persons are sworn to give a true account of all that they know about the matter, and to make sincere answers to all questions which shall be asked them upon such occasions.

THIS is the only way of discovering the truth in tryals: It can be brought to light only by the report of proper witnesses, and it can be got out of such witnesses by no such effectual motive, as by charging them to declare it upon Oath. For there may happen to be several reasons why a witness would not report all that he knows of a mat-

ter, if he were left to his own choice, or had no more than the face of a Court to move him to do it. The party to be cast by his evidence, may be his near relation, friend, or benefactor; of a family at least that hath done him much good, and may still do him more. The person that shall gain by his testimony, may be a stranger, or one against whom he has some party, family, or personal grudge. In both these cases he may suppress the truth, and speak agreeably to his affection or prejudice, no body being able to detect him. But when he takes an oath to declare the whole truth, and to speak nothing but the truth, this lays him under an obligation superior to all others. For hereby he appeals to God, whom he acknowledges to be the searcher of hearts, to bear witness of his sincerity, and to take vengeance of him if he prevaricates. So that now he has no room left to behave according to his own discretion, to shew kindness to one side or animosity to another, but is bound in his depositions to have regard to the Truth only, let the consequence be what it will. It now concerns the welfare of his soul and body, to be honest and open-hearted. His present and future hopes of God's mercy depend upon his veracity.

THIS is the most likely way to bring truth to light, and controversies to a just issue, so as that questions of right and wrong, guilt and innocence, might be truly decided in Courts of Judicature. And therefore this way hath been generally practised in all governments, even in that of God's own erecting among the People of *Israel*, whom he enjoined by his Law to end their controversies by the testimony of three, or at least of two witnesses. And tho' in speaking of them, the Sacred Text does not expressly say they were sworn; yet when we consider what the Scripture says of an

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an Oath, how necessary it was for the putting an end to all doubts and disputes, and that in cases of this nature, the best men's word was not taken without it, we cannot doubt but witnesses answered upon oath.

As to the form, they were to swear by the living God in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness: and as for the manner of administering it, the Judge or Officer spoke the words to the person that was to answer him, and solemnly charged him to answer all truly upon that oath. Instances of such adjuration we have many in Scripture. That of *Eli to Samuel* is very express, *1 Sam. iii. 17. Samuel my son, what is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee, bide it not from me. God do so to thee, and more also, if thou bide any thing from me, of all the things which he hath said unto thee.*

WHETHER the Litigants were obliged to make oath of their own innocence in the cause to be tryed, or of any point that occurred in it, I cannot affirm. But this we find, that the *Jewish High-priest*, in the tryal of our Lord, adjured him to answer upon oath, whether he were the Christ or not; and he answered accordingly. And it was a rule in the Civil Law, as we learn from *Justinian's Code, L. iv. T. 59.* that Plaintiff, Defendant and Advocates should swear, that they were perswaded of the goodness of their cause, and did not come into Court with any design to calumniate, or be vexatious to one another. I wish such a Law were in force among us. It might happily prevent many suits and actions, where both sides could not stand the test of such an oath. I am sure it argued a great concern to prevent them, in the Governours of those times and places where it prevailed.



BUT where a cause is brought to a trial, the issue of it chiefly depends upon the consentient testimony of the witnesses. For so we heard from the Law of God; and I think it is the general practice at this day, that the concurring evidence of two or three witnesses shall be the ground of a man's gaining or losing his cause.

WHICH being so, how careful should witnesses be to follow the direction of their oath, and to speak the truth plainly without any colouring, and fully without stifling any part of it? Since the Judges sentence, which determines of the lives, fortunes, and reputations of men, must be grounded upon their testimony! Not that they are to concern themselves what the sentence shall be. All their business is, to speak the truth, that justice may be done, whether it be for or against men. This is agreeable to the will of God and the Law, and they are sworn to do it. But I say, when innocent men are tryed and cast, and punished with the loss of life or limb, estate or reputation, by the lying lips of false witnesses, what a load of guilt do such witnesses bring upon their own heads? To say nothing of their Perjury, they become murderers, spoilers, defamers of the injured sufferers. For all whose sufferings they are accountable: for the Judge and Jury must go according to their proofs and allegations.

WITH great propriety therefore *Solomon* calls the man that bears false witness against his neighbour, *a maw, and a sword, and a sharp arrow*, *Prov. xxv. 18.* He is indeed every thing that is deadly and destructive. And in another place, *Prov. xviii. 21.* he says, *Death and life are in the power of the tongue.* The good or harm which it can do is inestimable. By a false charge it destroys men, and saves them by testifying the truth.

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ON the other hand, a prevaricating witness who delivers his evidence so, as to acquit him who would have been condemned, if the truth had been told, hereby becomes the occasion of an infinite deal of mischief. He defrauds the right owner of his estate or money, and gives it to one who hath no right to it. He rescues malefactors from the hand of Justice, which had laid hold of them, perhaps for Murder, and so contracts a guilt in the blood which they had shed; perhaps for robbery, or some other abominable crime, and so lets loose wolves among the sheep, and makes himself in a great measure accountable for all the murders, robberies and crimes which they shall commit afterwards. Briefly, he is an enemy to that Justice and Judgment which ought to reign upon Earth, and disappoints the intent of all good Laws, divine and human, which were intended to be a terror to evil-doers, and a praise and protection to those that do well.

FROM all this we see the reason of the sentence contained in my Text, why a false witness should not be unpunished. Now let us see what sort of punishments the Laws of God and men have allotted for him.

And *First*, I observe, that in the most sacred part of the divine Law, I mean the Decalogue, there is an express prohibition, which says, *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.* And presently after, it was enacted, *Deut. xix. 16.* that if the Judges discovered any man bearing false witness against another, they should inflict the same pains upon him, as the accused should have suffered, had the allegations proved true. And lest the Judges should prove too tender to execute this sentence upon the false witness, the great Legislator commands positively, saying, *Thine eye shall not pity, but thou shalt do to him, as he thought*

*thought to have done to his brother; life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, limb for limb.* If scourging was the penalty of the crime alledged, he was to receive the same number of stripes; if the loss of a sum of money, he was to be fined the very same sum. So, says the Text, *shalt thou put away the evil from among you, i. e.* the crime of false witness, by this publick punishment of it, will not become a national guilt. And others will take warning by it, and be deterred from committing the like villany another time.

*Secondly,* AMONG the *Athenians* an action lay, not only against a false witness, but also against the party who produced him. Upon both they set a fine, and they were made infamous. And if they were found thrice guilty of this crime, not only they, but their posterity were made infamous throughout all generations.

*Thirdly,* THE punishment of false witness among the old *Romans*, by the Law of their twelve Tables, was, to cast the criminal headlong from the top of the *Tarpeian Rock*. Afterwards, by a Law called *Lex Remmia*, false witnesses were stigmatized in the face with the Letter K, denoting them to be calumniators. When the Emperors became Christians, false accusers were punished with infamy, banishment, and such other pains as they would have brought upon the accused party, if their charge had proved true; as we learn from several places of the Imperial Codes. By the Ecclesiastical Laws these offenders were excommunicated, and put to the same long and severe penance with murderers, robbers, or otherwise, according to the import and mischievous effects of their false witness.

*Fourthly,* BY our own Statute Law, 5 *Eliz. c. 9.* it is declared, that 'if any persons, either by subornation or their own act, shall wilfully and  
'cor-



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‘ corruptly commit perjury by their deposition in  
‘ any of the Queen’s Courts, or being examined *ad*  
‘ *perpetuam rei memoriam*, every such person shall  
‘ lose 20 *l.* and be imprisoned by the space of six  
‘ months, and his oath shall not be received in  
‘ any Court of Record, until the Judgment shall  
‘ be reversed. And if such offender shall not have  
‘ goods or chattels to the value of 20 *l.* he shall  
‘ be set on the pillory in some market place,  
‘ where he shall have both his ears nailed, &c.  
‘ As to his forfeiture, the one moiety shall be to  
‘ the Queen, the other moiety to such persons as  
‘ shall be aggrieved.’ By other Acts the imprisonment of the insolvent offender is to be in the House of correction for twelve months.

THIS is a short specimen of such human penalties as have been awarded to false witnesses, considered as pests of mankind, and enemies of the Laws and Government of the respective communities to which they belong.

BUT if either thro’ the neglect of the Magistrate, or for want of prosecution, or of sufficient proof to convict them of their crime, they should receive no correction from the hand of man; yet they must not hope to escape that wrath of God which he hath threatened to those that take his name in vain, after so provoking and gross a manner.

FOR however they may hold the place and bear the character of honest men in the business of the World, yet God who seeth not as man seeth, hath assured them that he will not hold them guiltless; and their own conscience, which is instead of a thousand witnesses, will not acquit them.

WHEN the People complained in *Malachi’s* time, ii. 17. saying, *Every one that doth evil, is good in the sight of the Lord: or in the words of Solomon, there is one event to the righteous and to the*

wicked; to him that sweareth rashly and falsely, and to him that feareth such an oath; and cryed out upon it, *Where is the God of Judgment?* God answered them by the same Prophet, iii. 5. *I will come near to you in Judgment, and I will be a swift witness against false swearers.* To this purpose he shewed the Prophet *Zachary* the Vision of a Flying Roll, twenty cubits long and ten broad; and told him, *This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth, shall be cut off on this side, according to it; and every one that sweareth, shall be cut off on that side. I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it, with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof.*

THE Prophet *Hosea*, who was cotemporary with *Isaiah*, cries out to the men of his generation, Chap. iv, saying, ‘Hear the word of the Lord, ye Children of *Israel*: for the Lord hath a controversy with the Inhabitants of the Land, because there is no truth in it. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery (which is always aggravated with perjury) they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the Land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of Heaven, yea the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.’ After him, *Jeremiah* who saw the cities and fields of his Country laid waste by the *Chaldeans*, says, that rash and false swearing was one of those crying sins which had brought them into that mournful condition, *Jer. xxiii. 10.* Upon which place a learned Commentator of our own observes, That ‘the Jewish forms of adjuration, used in their Courts of Justice for the discovery  
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of the truth, had usually an imprecation joyned with them: and that the words here referred to, import, that men ventured to forswear themselves, and incur the imprecation, rather than discover the truth in cases of theft and such like crimes, wherein they were called upon to be witnesses.' Such curses doth the violation of Sacred Truth bring upon mankind in their temporal concerns.

AND how it forfeits our title to the spiritual mercies of God in Christ, we may hear from the Fathers of our Church, in that Homily which they have composed for us upon this subject. 'When, say they, men laying their hands upon the Gospels, do swear truly to enquire, and to make a true presentment of things wherewith they are charged, and not to forbear speaking the truth, and acting truly, for favour, love, fear, or malice of any person, as God shall help them, and the holy contents of that Book: They must consider, that in that Book is contained God's everlasting Truth, his most holy and eternal Word, whereby we have forgiveness of our sins, and are made Inheritors of Heaven, to live for ever with God's Angels and Saints in joy and gladness. In the Gospel likewise are contained God's terrible threats to obstinate Sinners, that will not amend their lives, nor believe the truth of God's holy Word, and the everlasting pain prepared in Hell for idolaters, hypocrites, for false and vain swearers, for perjured men, for false witnesses, for false condemners of innocent and guiltless men, and for them which for favour hide the crimes of evil-doers, that they should not be punished. So that whosoever wilfully forswear themselves upon Christ's holy Gospels, they utterly forsake God's mercy, goodness, and truth, the merits of our Saviour Christ's Nativity, Life, Passion, Death,



‘ Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, they refuse  
 ‘ the forgiveness of Sins, promised to all penitent  
 ‘ Sinners, the Joys of Heaven, the communion of  
 ‘ Angels and Saints for ever. All which benefits  
 ‘ and comforts are promised to true Christians in  
 ‘ the Gospel.’

MAY these words effectually awaken us all to a serious consideration of the oaths, vows, and obligations of duty which we lie under to God and man; that we may bewail our misfortune, if at any time we have sworn or vowed any thing rashly, unadvisedly, or against the judgment and persuasion of our Conscience; that we may repent of any trespass we have committed in the matter of a lawful oath, in any trust or office that we have taken upon us; if we have been too apt to omit things which should have been done, and to do those things which we ought not to have done; if we have not been so true in our words, nor so upright in our dealings as the Laws of justice and righteousness require; let us henceforth sanctifie the holy and reverend name of God, by abstaining from rash and vain swearing, and faithfully performing all lawful oaths, vows and promises; let us be sincere and faithful in our dealings, putting away lying, and speaking every man truth to his neighbour, as being members of the same body. So will the God of truth be nigh unto us in all that we call upon him for; he will be true to his promises in pardoning our sins, and will open the Gates of his holy Habitation to such faithful Servants, thro’ the merits of the Lord our Righteousness, *Jesus Christ*; To whom &c.



# SERMON LII.

*On the First Sunday in ADVENT.*



ISAIAH ii. 19.

*And they shall go into the holes of the rocks,  
and into the caves of the earth, for fear  
of the Lord, and for the glory of his Maje-  
sty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the  
Earth.*

**T**HE fear of God, and the shame of sinning,  
are sentiments which nature has engra-  
ven in the heart of man, on purpose  
to keep him within the bounds of vir-  
tuous courses, and to check him when-  
ever he finds himself transgressing those bounds.  
There is no sinner who does not feel the stirrings  
and reluctance of these principles at the first ap-  
proaches of any vitious temptations: And there-  
fore when he is resolved to embrace them, he does  
his utmost to stifle the fear of God, and conceal  
himself from the notice of the World. And by  
the power of infidelity, and the veil of hypocrisie,  
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he is commonly too successful in the subduing of his own virtue.

BUT how short, alas, and vain is his triumph! The day of the Lord is coming, when the gloomy covering of infidelity and hypocrisie shall be dissipated, and sin shall appear in its native deformity; when that shame and fear which could not restrain it, shall become its eternal plague and torment. For such will be the revelation of the last day: The terrible Judge will strike such a trembling and confusion into the soul of the guilty sinner, as will fully revenge his former contempts; and so expose all his abominations before Angels and men, that his hypocritical arts and colourings will but redound to his greater shame. Then will he be glad *to bide himself in the rocks and caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his Majesty.* Which words will give us occasion to consider the penal fear and shame which I am speaking of.

AND *First*, It is some alleviation of a man's misfortune, if he knows the worst of it. For the fear and apprehension of evil is sometimes worse than the evil itself. But this rule holds good only in temporal evils. There is no room for it in those which are infinite and eternal, always present, and always to come, which will be the condition of all reprobate Spirits.

IN the present state of things, men can harden their hearts against all the threatnings and terrors of the Lord: and have so accustomed themselves to dispute and disbelieve every thing which is supernatural, that the concerns of another World make but faint impressions upon them. But in hell there is no such incredulity: *The very Devils believe and tremble.* They are like guilty prisoners, who live under continual apprehensions of the appearance of the Judge, the sentence of Condemnation, and the hand of the Executioner. For tho' they



they are now under a state of reprobation, yet the measure of their punishment is not yet filled up; They are reserved unto the Judgment of the last day, when their furnace shall be heated seven times hotter than ever it was before. This they know will certainly be their doom, and they tremble at the prospect of it.

BUT yet such is their enmity to mankind, that they labour all they can to make Infidels of all our World, and would have no man to trouble himself with the thoughts of a judgment to come; but to live without care, and die without fear, like the beast that perisheth.

IN this the policy of the Devil is most directly opposed to the Wisdom of God: For if he can but persuade men to live without any concern about a future State, he knows how effectually this will destroy the whole systeme of Religion, and leave men to the entire pursuit of their own covetous and carnal passions, to do every thing that is right in their own eyes.

FOR this is the reasoning of the wise *Solomon*, that a young man might securely rejoice and indulge himself in every youthful lust, and walk in the ways of his heart and sight of his eyes without restraint, were it not for this apprehension, that God will one day enter into judgment with him, and punish him for his contemptuous transgressions of the divine Law. It is the frank confession of the Apostle *St. Paul*, that if a *Christian* had nothing to hope or fear beyond this life, it would be much wiser and happier for him to live like other men. For to what purpose should he expose himself to bodily sufferings, if he has nothing but a body to take care of? or why should he neglect any thing of his portion of good things, if he is to receive the whole of it in this life?

THE great foundation therefore on which the substance of our Religion is built, is the belief of that day when God shall call men to an account for all the works which they have done in this life, and shall deal with them according to the promises and threatnings of his own word. Thus the Gospel treats with us, not as bare citizens of this world, but as creatures who are to be happy or miserable to all eternity in a future state. Which certainly is the most powerful motive that can be offered to us, to stir us up to care and circumspection, that we may so order our present conversation, and so conform our thoughts, words and actions to the rule of God's word, that when we come to be tried by it, we may be found faithful in our obedience to it.

THE way not to be afraid of the wrath of God then, is to stand in awe of it now. For first or last we must unavoidably be affected with the dread of it. And they that can live without the fear of God in this world, shall be filled with the terrors of the Lord in the day of his vengeance, when his wrath shall be revealed from Heaven. At present it is discovered but in part: yet these lesser discoveries of it, have been strong enough to shock the most daring Atheists. *At the voice of thy thunder they are afraid,* says the holy Psalmist: And indeed this kind of manifestation of the Deity has driven them into the holes of the Rocks and the caves of the Earth. *Aristotle*, who knew no more of Religion than what Nature teaches, affirms, that *to out-brave the thunder is not a sign of fortitude, but of fool-hardiness and madness.* And we see what horrors of conscience some grievous sinners labour under, without any external cause to occasion them; so that their soul chuses strangling and death rather than life. This shews what God can do, and how easy it is for him to strike

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terror into the most hardened sinner, even while he does but apprehend the weight of God's displeasure.

THIS, we must confess, is not the case of sinners in general. Many there are who offending with a high hand, and as it were in defiance of the God of Heaven, seem to have no remorse or check upon them, and affect to go out of the world as fearless and undaunted as they have lived in it, accounting it unmanly, and a sign of a mean spirit, to be afraid of any thing.

BUT why should these be exempted from the pangs of a guilty conscience more than the other? It is very certain they shall not. For tho' their sins do not find them out, and clamour in their consciences here; tho' the fury of God's wrath do not burn up their blood and spirits in this life, that is nothing. The time is so short, it is not worth reckoning. God will ere long arise, and terribly shake the Earth; he will even shake these proud sinners out of their graves, where they would be glad to lie hid and be forgotten to all eternity: And when they are thus raised, they will run about like wild beasts, seeking to shelter themselves in any holes and caves from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his Majesty, who in that day will be glorified over all his enemies.

SUCH a visitation is necessary to manifest the power of God, and the impotence of the Creature. It was the complaint of religious men of old; *Lord, how long shall the ungodly, how long shall the ungodly triumph! how long shall all wicked doers speak so disdainfully, and make such proud boasting!* The insolence of Atheism is such, that it defies the justice of God for a time, so that his servants are forced to fly before it, and importune him to arise and vindicate his own cause. And indeed his threat-



threatnings would be but empty words, were they not certainly to be fulfilled, either in the conversion of the reclaimable, or the destruction of incorrigible sinners.

He hath declared that he hath an extraordinary indignation at proud men, *i. e.* such as have no regard for his Laws, and that he will one day effectually humble and abase them. The world hath not always seen this done; but all the world shall be sure to see it done at last. And then that glory of God which is now eclipsed and run down by triumphant impieties, shall shine out in its full lustre. To see these sons of violence, who could not be convinced nor wrought upon by the preaching of God's word, who would not see him in his works of Creation and Providence; who would not acknowledge him as a Father in his mercies, nor as a Judge and Master in his corrections; to see these inflexible spirits bowed down at the last, to see them trembling before that God whom they had scorned and denied, and casting about their own haughty looks to spy any hole where they might hide themselves from him; this will be an entire glorification of the divine Majesty, and give full satisfaction to all his Saints, when they shall behold their great Master thus putting his and their enemies under his feet.

SINCE then we must of necessity fear God sooner or later, either with the reverence of dutiful children, or with the horror of damned and reprobate Spirits, what need we to ask counsel of any, or deliberate upon a matter which is so easily determined? the present fear being mixed with love, and improveable to the greatest delight; the other having a venomous alloy of hatred, and attended with endless torments. When we fear God as a merciful and gracious Father, we live easy in his Family, and rejoice in his Presence; but a  
guilty

guilty fear causes us to fly from him like our first parent, dreading him as justly provoked to be angry with us, and ready to execute his threatned judgments upon us. Briefly, if we fear God as dutiful children, we shall be sure to hate those things which are displeasing to him, and so hate as to forbear and avoid them, and consequently keep our minds free from that guilty fear which puts a distance between us and our God.

*THE fear of the Lord, says Solomon, is the beginning of wisdom; and I will venture to add, that it is the end of it too; for a man can never be denominated wise one moment without this fear; whenever he lays it aside, he certainly plays the fool. Whatever transgressions the wisest and best of men have at any time been guilty of; they have committed them only then when they have been destitute of this fear: And have not recovered their former character, till they have fallen down, and humbled themselves before God, and confessed that it was the most grievous and deplorable kind of folly, to depart from him. Happy therefore, says the sacred Oracle, is the man that feareth always: And it describes the wise man as always influenced and directed by this fear, and reckons the presumptuous, haughty, and high-minded in the number of fools. A wise man, says he, feareth and departeth from evil; but a fool rageth, and is confident. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.*

THIS indeed is the grand characteristick of a wise man, to be provident of the time to come, and so vigilant over his present actions, that they may not give him occasion to repent of them in the issue. This is a constant rule in the management of temporal affairs. But it holds more strongly in Religion, because the consequences are of

infinitely greater moment. Any man who believes the day is coming when God shall sit in judgment upon him, and reward or punish him to all Eternity, according to his observance of the divine Law in this life, must be an arrant fool, and act contrary to all the maxims of common prudence, if he is not careful to know what this divine Law is, and so attentive to his own life and conversation, as to govern himself by the directions of it. Because it is a concern of the last importance; his work on which his reward depends, is confined to this present life; no farther day will be allowed him for it. So that if when he is called hence, he be found wanting, he will be miserable to all Eternity.

AND the same wisdom will shew a man the necessity of being humble, and living in the fear of God. It will shew him how unable he is to resist the temptations wherewith he is surrounded, and discharge the duties of his station and calling, whatever it be, except he be diligent in his Prayers and such other religious Exercises as are appointed by God for obtaining the grace and assistance of his holy Spirit. For by such exercises alone will he be able to affect his mind with a just awe and regard of the divine Majesty. By frequently hearing the histories of God's Saints, and their wise sayings and grave admonitions, he will keep up in himself a quick sense and discernment between the nature of good and evil: He will perceive the imperfection of his best services, and be the more careful to avoid all gross offences, as knowing how apt he is to offend daily in lesser matters, and how much he falls short of that exactness, which it were to be wished he could attain to in his obedience of God's Laws.

THERE is no man who by daily reading and hearing of God's word, keeps the rule of his life in



in his eye, but he must see that he has manifold reasons to be humbled for not acting up to it; and cry out with the holy Psalmist, *Who can tell how oft he offendeth? If thou Lord shouldest be exact to mark what is done amiss, who may abide it?* What is the reason that there is so little true fear of God in the world, but because men, generally speaking, are so negligent to acquaint themselves with him, and are so over-run with infidelity, that they neither believe he now calls upon them for that obedience which is preached to them, nor will reckon with them about it at the last day. If they had but a lively apprehension and thorough convictions of the truth of these points, that God is the Legislator and Judge of the World, and that the holy Scriptures are the systems of his Laws, then we should quickly see another face of things; the influence of his fear would effectually restrain the far greatest part of the enormities which abandoned men are daily committing with all security and greediness.

BUT this, alas, is a happy state, which hath never yet been seen, and it is to be feared never will be till the day of Judgment. And then indeed all men shall fear God, but not to their happiness; it shall be part of the punishment of the wicked that they shall fear him so as to with themselves at the greatest distance from him, so as to be utterly buried in oblivion, and forgotten of him. The supports which now set them above his fear, will then fail them. The silver and gold in which they put their confidence; the port and dignity which they bear in the world; their great relations, friends, and servants, which cause them to think highly of themselves, will then appear as so many cyphers and shadows which cannot profit them. *In that day, says our Prophet, shall a man cast his idols of silver and his idols of gold, and in-*

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deed whatsoever he had idolized, *to the moles, and to the bats.* And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.

AND as horrible fear, so shall shame and confusion of face be the portion of all those, who will not now be restrained by a virtuous modesty from offending against God. Such a modesty is implanted in the nature of man on purpose to keep him back from doing those things which are unseemly and of evil report, insomuch that he is ashamed and blushes not only when such doings are discovered in him, but even when he is suspected of them. But it is well known that some men, by accustoming themselves to sinning, can shake off all the restraints of modesty, and practise the most vile and brutish lusts with openness and freedom, as if there were nothing in them but what was honest and worthy to be done.

NOW such people having abandoned themselves to a shameless course of living here, not regarding the Laws of God or Man, it is very meet that the shame which should have prevented their punishment, should at last become a part of it; and that those who were blind to their spiritual deformities here, should at last be made so sensible of them, that they would be glad to be buried and for ever locked up in any hole or corner of the universe, that no eye might see them.

AND thus I have shown how unavoidable it is for every one of us, first or last, to be affected with the passions of fear and shame. If we will be so affected with them now in this life, as to be withheld by them from sinning against God, they shall not be our punishment hereafter. But if we will cast them off here, and chuse to herd with the scorers of God's word, and the despisers of virtue, we shall be dreadfully affected with them

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at the last, when they shall be no longer curbs to preserve our virtue, but fiends and furies to plague us for our impudent enormities.

LET us then wisely make choice of these restraints in due season, and keep up their influence so strong in our minds, that no sinful temptation, even in the closest retirement and most secret corner, may ever be able to prevail against them. Then shall we not be ashamed or afraid to meet our Lord in the glory of his Majesty, *when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth*; but shall lift up our faces with joy, as knowing that it is the day of our Salvation, that we are ready to be delivered from all objects of terror and amazement, into the joy of our Lord, and ever live with him in that secure and happy Kingdom where he liveth &c.



**U 3**

**SERMON**





# SERMON LIII.

*On the Second Sunday in ADVENT.*



ISAIAH XXIV. 1.

*Behold, the Lord maketh the Earth empty,  
and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside  
down, and scattereth abroad the Inhabitants  
thereof.*



**I**T is observable, that the Prophecies of the Old Testament abound more with the denunciations of God's temporal Judgments than Favours to the World; which is no argument that the Prophets were morose men, or haters of mankind. For they spake no otherwise than as they saw things represented in their spiritual Visions. And indeed any man may, without a Spirit of Prophecy, see that the state of this World will be always more miserable than happy, because it ever was, and ever will be more vicious than virtuous: and vice will always be productive of calamity, so long as Death is the wages of Sin.

Now if it be demanded whether the Prophecy before us concern the Land of *Israel*, or the Countries

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tries round about it, whose desolation *Isaiah* had threatened in the foregoing Chapters; I answer, it may well be understood to comprehend them all. And whereas he had set forth the impending fate of particular Countries before, he now sums them up all together in this Chapter, which begins with the words of my Text, *Behold, the Lord maketh the Earth empty, &c.*

IN which words the Prophet represents the nature of the calamity which should come upon the Land, together with the efficient cause or author of it, and the means whereby it should be brought to pass.

I. THE nature of the calamity is, the *emptiness* or desolation of the Earth. Which being the common parent and nurse of all living Creatures, there is a great pleasure in seeing fruitful fields, gardens, and green pastures, because they are tokens of a good number of Inhabitants, and do as it were offer us all the necessary provisions and comforts of life. On the contrary, a long prospect of desert and barren ground is very disagreeable to the eye, because it presents us with the ghastly picture of Famine, with the apprehension of Savage Beasts and Robbers, and with that solitude and want of human Society, which is naturally horrid and odious to us.

AND therefore the threatening to make a Land waste and barren, is one of the rods which God holds over the heads of people, to make them stand in fear of him, and keep them to the observance of religion and virtue. Accordingly we often meet with this threatening in the Law and the Prophets. *Cursed is the ground for thy sin*, said God to *Adam*: *Thorns and Thistles shall it bring forth unto thee.* 'If thou wilt not fear the name of the Lord thy God, and observe to do all the Laws which he hath given thee, says *Moses* to

' *Israel, Lev. xxvi. 19. the Lord shall make your*  
 ' *Heaven as iron, and your Earth as brass. Thou*  
 ' *shalt carry much seed out into the field, and*  
 ' *shalt gather but little in: for the locust shall*  
 ' *consume it. Thou shalt plant vine-yards and*  
 ' *dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine,*  
 ' *nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat*  
 ' *them. Thou shalt have olive-trees throughout*  
 ' *all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thy*  
 ' *self with the oyl: for thy olive shall cast its*  
 ' *fruit. All thy trees and fruit of thy Land shall*  
 ' *the Locusts consume. Deut. xxviii. 38.*

II. THE Author or efficient cause of such de-  
 solation, is God. For *it is the Lord*, says the Pro-  
 phet here, *who maketh the Earth empty and waste,*  
*and turneth it upside down.* And therefore this cala-  
 mity does not happen by any blind chance, or the  
 agency of meer natural causes. There were in-  
 deed of old, and there always will be a generati-  
 on of ungodly men, who say, *The Lord will not*  
*do good, neither will he do evil.* ' Thick clouds  
 ' are a covering to him, that he seeth not, and  
 ' he walketh or confineth himself in the Circuit  
 ' of Heaven. Do not all things happen promi-  
 ' scuously to good and bad men, to the clean and  
 ' unclean, to the pious Worshipper and the A-  
 ' theist, to him that sweareth falsely, and to him  
 ' that feareth an oath? What then is the Almight-  
 ' ty to us, that we should serve him? and what  
 ' profit is there in praying to him? what advan-  
 ' tage shall we have, if we keep his Command-  
 ' ments, and walk carefully before him?"

SUCH is the language of atheistical men, who  
 deny the Providence of God: And such notions  
 I fear many entertain in their hearts, who do not  
 speak them out with their lips. We see that e-  
 ven men professing religion, do commonly pass  
 over the occurrences of the World with little re-  
 gard,



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gard, as if there was nothing of the hand of God in them to order and direct them. But all the principles of religion, and the sayings of the best and most observing men in all ages, call loudly upon us to look up to God as the supreme Governour of this World, and the Dispenser of the present as well as future rewards and punishments of mankind. *David* says that all the Elements and powers of nature hear God's voice, and fulfil his word; and the Son of *David*, our blessed Lord, assures us, that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the will of God, and that he numbers the very hairs of our heads.

Now if the Divine Care and Providence extend to such minute and almost worthless things as these, how much more reason have we to believe that he has the ordering and disposing of all greater matters? and what a slight do we put upon him, how do we rob him of his honour, when we let things pass as the effects of fortune or chance, and are not led by them to pray to God, to fear him, to adore and magnifie him for the wonders that he doth among the children of men?

III. Let us consider the means or second causes whereby God makes a Land waste, and turns it upside down. The most eminent of these causes are, pestilence, sword, fire, unseasonable weather, and noxious creatures; by which means the Inhabitants are impoverished, destroyed, scattered abroad, and their community is finally dissolved.

*First*, PESTILENCE is one of those calamities which is inflicted by the hand of God, as his Judgment upon a sinful People. Thus he threatens *Israel* in case of disobedience, *Deut. xxviii. 58.*  
' If thou wilt not observe this Law, then the  
' Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the  
' plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, sore  
' sick-

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‘ sicknesses, and of long continuance. Moreover  
 ‘ he will bring upon thee all the diseases of *Egypt*,  
 ‘ which thou wast afraid of: Also every other  
 ‘ sickness and plague, not written in this Book,  
 ‘ will he bring upon thee, ’till thou be destroyed.’  
 This threatening was several times executed upon  
 the rebellious *Jews*. And their Rulers were so  
 sensible that it was an immediate scourge from  
 Heaven, that they applied not medicines to cure  
 it, but had recourse to religious atonements for  
 the removal of it. Thus when multitudes died  
 on the occasion of *Korah's* Rebellion, *Aaron* took  
 a Censer and put incense on it, and stood between  
 the Living and the Dead, and the Plague was stayed.  
 Again, when this People were struck with the  
 like distemper after they had been numbered by  
*David*, he presently built an Altar, and offered sa-  
 crifice to God for them, whereby they were  
 healed.

THESE two cases I have mentioned to show,  
 that Pestilences were esteemed to be the immediate  
 Scourges and Judgments of God.

Secondly, WAR is likewise another method which  
 God takes to waste and overturn a People: As he  
 threatens in the forementioned xxviii. of *Deuter*.  
 ‘ The Lord, says he, shall cause thee to be smit-  
 ‘ ten before thine Enemies: thou shalt go out one  
 ‘ way against them, and flee seven ways before  
 ‘ them. A Nation shall come against thee from  
 ‘ afar, from the ends of the Earth; a Nation of  
 ‘ a strange language and fierce countenance, which  
 ‘ shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew  
 ‘ favour to the young. He shall eat the fruit of  
 ‘ thy Cattle and of thy land, ’till thou be de-  
 ‘ stroyed: He shall not leave thee corn, wine, or  
 ‘ oyl, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of  
 ‘ thy sheep. And he shall besiege thee in all thy  
 ‘ Gates, till he have thrown down all thy high and  
 ‘ fenced

' fenced walls wherein thou trustedst, throughout  
' thy Land.' How this was executed upon dis-  
obedient *Israel*, both their own Sacred History  
and other Writers have abundantly declared; and  
they are at this day scattered over the face of the  
whole Earth, to testify to all the World the ac-  
complishment of God's threatnings by the arms  
of their powerful Conquerors. And tho' other  
people have not been so signally dispersed abroad,  
yet where is the Nation which God hath not over-  
turned by the sword, for such grievous sins as he  
hath threatned to visit with this Judgment?

*Thirdly*, A third Judgment which wastes and de-  
stroys a People, is Fire; i. e. the burning of towns  
and houses, either with fire from Heaven, or with  
the Element so called of constant use amongst us.  
And tho' I cannot say, that this is so expressly  
and fully threatned as the Judgments before re-  
cited, yet by all wise and pious men it hath been  
reckoned in the number of God's Judgments. *A*  
*fire, says Eliphaz, shall consume the Tabernacles of*  
*bribery, Job xv. 34. A fire not blown, says Zophar,*  
*Job xx. 26. shall consume the wicked, and shall de-*  
*vour their substance. Upon such, says the Psalmist,*  
*God will rain fire and brimstone, storm and tempest.*  
Thus he rained upon *Sodom* and the neighbouring  
cities, by the testimony of undeniable History;  
and he tells rebellious *Israel*, *I have overthrown some*  
*of you, as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, i. e. by*  
*fire, whether from Heaven or Earth, is not mate-*  
*rial for us to know; the destruction in effect be-*  
*ing much the same, Amos iv. 10. And thus he*  
*threatens several Nations by the same Prophet,*  
*Chap. i. 2. ' I will send a fire into the house of*  
*' Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ber-*  
*' badad. I will send a fire upon the walls of Ga-*  
*' za, Tyrus, Temon, Moab, and Judah, which shall*  
*' devour their palaces.'* Briefly, it is a known me-  
thod



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thod of God's Judgment, that he punisheth by fire, insomuch that he himself is styled a *consuming fire*.

*Fourthly*, UNSEASONABLE weather is one sort of means which God uses to lay waste and destroy a Land: and that by the extremes either of heat or cold, rain or drought. For he assures us, that he commands the clouds, orders the winds, and opens or shuts the windows of Heaven, as he sees fit: that he darkens the Sun and Moon, and restrains their influences from replenishing the Earth. That when he has given a plentiful crop, he sometimes sends an inundation of water to sweep it all away, and thus doubles the affliction of an unworthy people, by first showing them plenty, and bringing it almost into their Barns, and then snatching it from them, and leaving them to famish, and causing them to lose both their seed and the product of it. This is evident in experience, that unseasonable weather impairs both the quantity and quality of the fruits of the Earth, and may be so excessive as utterly to destroy them, and lay a Country waste and desolate.

*Fifthly*, NOXIOUS creatures and vermin are capable of working the same effect. Thus God threatens disobedient *Israel*, that all their trees and fruits should be eaten by the Locusts. And he styles the Locusts, the Canker-worm, the Caterpillar, and the Palmer-worm *his great Army*, which he sends to devour an incorrigible People, *Joel* ii. 25. Such indeed they proved to *Pharaoh*, *Exod.* x. 15. for they covered the face of all his Land, and darkened the air, and did eat every herb of the field, and fruit of the trees, so that there remained not any green thing, either of tree or grass throughout all the Land of *Egypt*. As mischievous were they afterwards in *Palestine*, as we learn from the Prophet *Joel*, who complains that they had

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had wasted the vines, and left no bark upon the fig-trees: that they had envenomed the seed so, that it rotted under the clod; and destroyed all the pastures, so that the beasts groaned, the herds of cattle were perplexed, and the flocks of sheep became desolate. God also tells his People by the Prophet *Amos*, Chap. iv. 9. 'I have smitten you with blasting and mildew; when your gardens, your vineyards, your fig-trees and olive-trees increased, the palmer-worm devoured them; yet have ye not returned unto me.' The like account of these creatures we have from other Writers who have enquired into the nature of animals, and especially such as have been acquainted with Countries where these vermin have been apt to swarm.

By all or any of these means, viz. pestilence, war, fire, unseasonable weather, and noxious creatures, does God lay waste a Country, and scatters the Inhabitants thereof.

AND the reasons of their dispersions and diminutions are evident. Pestilence and war are the immediate destroyers of life: and they likewise cut off the communications of traffick and merchandise, by which several Nations and Cities subsist: and must therefore of course sink, grow poor, and dispeopled, whenever such means of subsistence fail them. Hence it is, that *Isaiab*, in his twenty-third Chapter just before my Text calls upon the ships of *Tarshish*, i. e. the sea-faring Traders, to mourn for the miserable ruin of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, two sea-port Towns of the greatest Traffick in *Syria*, whose Merchants were Princes, whose Factors were accounted among the honourable Men of the Earth, because he foresaw that their Trade should be destroyed by the calamity of war, as it afterwards happened, there being now scarce any monument or remains left of them.

WAR

War and fire impoverish, and gradually dis-  
people a Country, by demolishing their houses,  
and consuming their goods, furniture, and sub-  
stance. Bad seasons and devouring vermin work  
the same effect, by destroying those fruits which  
are necessary to support the life and strength of  
man and beast. People must needs be diminished  
and grow thin, when the necessities of life, thro'  
want of product or some other event, become ve-  
ry dear to them; when Earth, the common pa-  
rent and nurse of mortal life, refuses to yield her  
increase, or that increase when produced, is either  
snatched away again by some Judgment of God,  
or squandered and consumed by the mismanage-  
ment of men.

ALL these means of destruction, we say, are but  
rods in the hand of God. We see indeed other  
hands which manage them and lay them on;  
but they are all secondary and subordinate to the  
Divine Will. The Kings and Rulers of the Earth  
treat of war and peace, but the power of giving  
a full effect and issue to such treaties is not in  
themselves. 'Tis God who *restrains the Spirit of*  
*Princes*; 'tis he who has the fashioning and form-  
ing the hearts of Kings, and turns their thoughts  
and resolutions to the accomplishing of his De-  
crees, while they think of nothing but doing their  
own will.—So pestilential distempers may just-  
ly be ascribed to poisonous vapours, which su-  
ming out of the bowels of the Earth, impregnate  
the air with their sickly matter: And this air be-  
ing continually breathed by men, corrupts their  
blood and spirits, and destroys them. But it is  
God who unloeks the deep and secret recesses of  
the Earth, where these vapours were confined, and  
commands them to ascend into the air, and breed  
à fatal sickness among men.



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So likewise when any of our habitations are reduced by the devouring flames to a heap of rubbish, we oftentimes hear that such conflagrations were occasioned by the negligence or malice of some people. Such people there are in the World, and certainly they deserve the greatest punishment. But it is thro' the just Judgment of God, that their negligence or malice hath such a dismal issue. He could have prevented it by the direction of his Providence, as we often see he doth in a wonderful manner. But when men have put themselves out of God's Protection, and are given up to his Justice for the punishment of their sins, their greatest vigilance shall not be able to secure them. For *except the Lord keep the City, the watchmen watch but in vain.*

Lastly, WHEN we labour under the calamity of a Famine, we presently ascribe it to unseasonable weather, to blasting and mildew, to locusts and vermin. These are the nearest and most visible causes of it. But we are blind if we cannot see farther, to that supreme Lord who commands the winds and the clouds, and all the powers of Heaven and Earth. He hath given us Revelation and reason enough to discern his Providence at the bottom of these things; and there is no more than a common capacity requisite to find it out.

AND thus we have seen the meaning of *Isaiah* in the words of my Text, viz. the nature of that calamity which he threatens should come upon the Earth; together with the efficient cause or author of it, and the means whereby it is usually effected. Let us now look a little farther, to discover the meritorious cause of this calamity. Which presently occurs, ver. 5. *The Earth, says he, is defiled under the Inhabitants thereof: because they have transgressed the Laws, changed the Ordinance, broken the everlasting Covenant. Therefore hath the curse de-*  
voured

*voured it, and they that dwell therein are desolate, the Inhabitants are burned, and few men left.*

THIS is agreeable to that original Covenant which God made with the first man, which he eminently renewed with his People *Israel*, and which is to be understood as the rule of his dealing with all Nations of the Earth, viz. 'That he will cause the Earth to afford them the necessities and comforts of life, so long as they serve him according to the measure of light and understanding which he hath given them.' *The Earth*, says the *Psalmist*, *God hath given to the children of men*: but he hath so given it, as that we are ever his Tenants, and are bound to render him, our supreme Lord, certain homage and obedience for the enjoyment of this inheritance. The particulars of this obedience are well known to all of us who know God's word. And when we fail in the performance of any of them, our Lord does not presently take the forfeiture, but hath graciously provided means, whereby we may make our peace with him. Which if we refuse to do, if we go on to transgress, and proceed from less degrees of disobedience to greater, till we grow to a contempt and defiance of our Lord, as it is usual for such offenders to do; then indeed he deprives us of his abused favours, withdraws his protection from us, and denies his blessing to the Earth and other Elements, that they become rather hurtful than profitable to us.

*THE Earth*, says our Prophet here, *is defiled under its Inhabitants*; meaning, that their sins had polluted it, and brought a Curse upon it. That which made their guilt in this respect the more inexcusable, was a plain admonition which *Moses* had given their forefathers to this purpose in the Wilderness, and which stood upon record for their instruction, *Lev. xviii.* where after he had declared several

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several abominations which were practised in *Egypt* and *Canaan*, to be utterly unlawful for them; he adds, 'Defile not yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the Nations are defiled which I cast out before you, and the Land is defiled: Therefore I visit their Iniquity upon it, and the Land it self vomiteth out her Inhabitants. Ye shall therefore keep my Statutes and Judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations which the people before you have committed, and defiled the Land with them. That the Land spew not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spewed out the Nations that were before you.'

UPON the whole it appears, that abominable and provoking sins are the cause which moves God to make any land empty and waste, and to turn it upside down, and to scatter abroad the Inhabitants thereof.

WHICH single consideration should perswade men, one would think, to fear God and observe his Covenant and Ordinances, even tho' they had nothing to hope or fear after this life: since so much religion is absolutely necessary for our temporal welfare. For if we believe either the sacred Scriptures, or other Histories of undoubted credit, we must believe that the incorrigible wickedness and corruption of Nations have finally ended in their utter dissolution, and brought Priest and people, master and servant, maid and mistress all upon a level; which is but a larger draught of that confusion expressed in my Text, by *turning the Earth upside down*. For where-ever there is any political Government, there must be distinctions of superior and inferior orders of people; which run into anarchy and confusion when Government is dissolved.



THIS the nation here threatned, have found verified to their cost : for together with their Country, they have lost both their royal and priestly Government, and the honourable distinctions of their Tribes and Families.

LET us who serve the same God, take heed of provoking him by the like sins, lest we incur the like punishment which they suffer. But let us rather apply our hearts to the practice of those duties of religion and virtue which will prove the stability of all that is desirable amongst us, and conduce to our entire happiness, having both the promise of this life present, and of that which is to come : thro' the merits &c.





# SERMON LIV.

*On the Third Sunday in ADVENT.*



ISAIAH xxvi. 1, 2.

*In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah : We have a strong city ; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth, may enter in.*

**F**OR the right understanding of which words, it may be proper to observe, that *Isaiab* in the foregoing Chapters had been representing all *Palestine* and the Kingdoms round about it, as a scene of desolation. *Israel* was going into captivity, and *Judah* was ripening apace for the same fate. Nor were their conquerors and other enemies who rejoiced at their fall, long to enjoy the pleasure of their triumphs. A heavy burden is laid upon *Moab*, and *Tyre*, and *Babylon* ; a burden which would press them down so, as never to rise again. But of *Jacob* he says, xvii. 4. *Tho' his glory*  
X 2 *shall*

*shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean: yet a gleanings shall be left of him, as the berries which remain after the shaking of an olive-yard, two or three in the top of the uppermost bough; four or five in the outmost branches.* This is spoken of Israel: and the like comparison is used of Judah, xxiv. 13. to which is added, *They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the Majesty of the Lord, i. e. in the day of their redemption, when God shall recall them from the Countries where he had scattered them.* This the Prophet declares more clearly and fully in other places of his Book. Particularly Chap. i. 25. ‘I will turn my hand  
 ‘ upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross,  
 ‘ and take away all thy rime: and I will restore  
 ‘ thy Judges as at the first, and thy Counsellors  
 ‘ as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called,  
 ‘ the city of righteousness, the faithful city.  
 ‘ Sion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her  
 ‘ Converts with righteousness. And Chap. iv. In  
 ‘ that day, he that is left in Sion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called Holy;  
 ‘ when the Lord shall have washed away the filth  
 ‘ of the Daughters of Sion, and shall have purged  
 ‘ the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof,  
 ‘ by the Spirit of Judgment, and by the Spirit of  
 ‘ burning. And it shall be said in that day, Ch.  
 ‘ xxv. Lo, this is our God, we have waited for  
 ‘ him, and he will save us: this is the Lord, we  
 ‘ have waited for him; we will be glad, and rejoice in his Salvation. For in this mountain  
 ‘ shall the hand of the Lord rest.’ And here in my Text he says, *In that day they shall sing this song in the land of Judah: We have a strong city &c.*

Now if it be demanded, what period of time, what day is this which the Prophet speaks of? We must answer, that it is the time when the people, who for their provocations were thrown in-



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to the furnace of affliction, and had continued in it till they were purged from their sins; were delivered from it, and restored to the favour of God, and the enjoyment of his former mercies. Of which restoration there are three kinds or degrees, plainly spoken of by the Prophet *Isaiab*. *First*, The *Jews* return from the land of their captivity, especially that of *Babylon*. *Secondly*, The restoration of the Family and Kingdom of *David* in the person of the *Messiah*. And *Thirdly*, The perfect felicity of that Kingdom in a state of future glory.

AND *First*, *Isaiab*, who foretold that his People should be captives in *Babylon*, speaks as expressly of their return from thence, Chap. xiv. 'For the Lord will have mercy on *Jacob*, and will yet chuse *Israel*, and set them in their own land:— and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were, and they shall rule over their oppressors. And it shall come to pass, in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, that thou shalt take up this Proverb against the King of *Babylon*, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased? the golden city ceased?' This was fulfilled in the memory of many of those who were carried away captives to *Babylon*. And of this event we must understand the words of my Text, if we take them in the most obvious and literal meaning. For many Songs did they sing in the land of *Judah* upon that occasion, as we find them in the Book of *Psalms*: and most properly might they sing this of the Prophet here before us. They had the greatest reason to call the salvation and blessing of God, *the walls and bulwarks* of their reviving *Jerusalem*. For without the special aid of God, how had they been able with their own few hands to fortifie themselves in their ruinous city,

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and to carry on the repairs of it, against the united forces of *Sanballat* and his army of *Samaritans*, *Tobiah* and his *Ammonites*, together with the *Arabians* and *Ashdodites*, who all conspired to come and fight against *Jerusalem*, and hinder the rebuilding of it, as we read *Nehem. iv.* But *Isaiab* had furnished them before-hand with the arguments of this Chapter, whereby they might be incited to wait upon God in the way of his Judgments, to turn the whole desire of their souls to the invocation of his name, and the remembrance of his former acts; to be sensible that he ordained them peace, and wrought all their works for them: to praise him for delivering them from those other Lords which once had the dominion over them, and henceforth to make mention of his name only; to trust in him for ever, as their everlasting strength, and to believe that he would keep them in perfect peace, so long as their minds were stayed on him.

THEY had seen how the hand of God had brought down those that dwelt on high, how low he had laid the lofty city of *Babylon* by the arms of *Cyrus*, so low that even the feet of the poor and the steps of the needy trampled upon its high places. They saw that their formidable Masters were dead; *i. e.* either deceased and gone out of the World, or dead in their politick capacity, so reduced and enfeebled by an adverse power, as not to be able to hold them any longer in subjection. Hence they were encouraged to hope, that their God who had thrown down their adversary *Babylon*, would again exalt his own *Jerusalem*; and having slain their enemies, would raise them as it were from the dead, out of the dust of the earth, to be called again by his name, and to glorifie him in his Holy Temple.

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SUCH were the arguments of success which the *Jews* at their restoration from their captivity, might raise to themselves out of this Chapter: which *Isaiab* seems to have composed with a three-fold view, as a prediction of the event, as a *Psalm* of praise to God for the deliverance, and as a joyful triumph over their Enemies. To this Restoration the words of my Text may be thought most applicable at first view, and in their literal Sense. For in those days, and upon that occasion, this Song was very proper to be sung in the land of *Judah*.

But Secondly, THERE is another Restoration which is often pointed out and promised by our Prophet, and that is, the Restoration of the Family and Kingdom of *David* in the person of the *Messiah*. Of this, the deliverances from *Egypt*, *Babylon*, and other enemies of *Israel*, were Types; and they were vouchsafed by the Divine Providence for this very end, that the *Messiah* might be born King of the *Jews*, in the Church and Nation of that People, while they subsisted as such in the World. For this purpose our Prophet, Chap. vii. promises him as a pledge and assurance to the house of *Ahaz*, that *Rezin* King of *Syria*, and *Pekah* King of *Israel* should not put an end to their Family and Nation in the invasion which they made upon *Judah*: 'For, says he, before the House and Tribe of *David* is extinct, a Virgin of your Family must conceive and bear a Son, whose name shall be called *Immanuel*,' otherwise the *Messiah*. In the ninth Chapter he is promised again. In the eleventh he is characterized as uniting *Jews* and *Gentiles* in one body. *There shall come forth a Rod out of the Stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.* Where the *Chaldee* Paraphrase runs thus: *A King shall come of the sons of Jesse, and the Messiah of his sons sons.* *Isaiab* proceeds; 'He



‘ shall stand for an Ensign of the People; to him  
 ‘ shall the *Gentiles* seek, and his rest shall be glo-  
 ‘ rious. And it shall come to pass in that day (in  
 ‘ the reign of the *Messiah*) the Lord shall set his  
 ‘ hand again the second time to recover the rem-  
 ‘ nant of his People which shall be left, from *As-*  
 ‘ *syria*, and from *Egypt*, and from *Patbros*; and  
 ‘ from *Cush*, and from *Elam*, and from *Sbinar*,  
 ‘ and from *Hamath*, and from the Islands of the  
 ‘ sea. And he shall set up an Ensign for the Na-  
 ‘ tions, and shall assemble the outcasts of *Israel*,  
 ‘ and gather together the dispersed of *Judah* from  
 ‘ the four corners of the earth.’

IT were easie to multiply proofs of this kind, but not necessary, since the *Jews* agree with us, that *Isaiab* abounds in Prophecies of the *Messiah*. In this we differ, that we apply them to our Lord *Jesus*, whom they reject. I shall not digress so far, as to enter into that controversie at present, but take it for granted that we are right: and then consider with what propriety *Isaiab*’s Song here before us, may be adapted to the times of *Christ* and his Church.

*IN that day, i. e. in the reign of the Messiah, shall this Song be sung in the land of Judah.* Here Interpreters would have us to take *Judah* in a spiritual sense, for the whole state of Christendom. And it is a warrantable interpretation; for so *Sion* and *Jerusalem* are often used to denote, by similitude, the Christian Church. And this Song is very pertinently taken into the devotions of all good Christians, both in our Churches and private houses. However, if we will seek for a literal accomplishment of this Prophecy by Christians in the land of *Judah*, we need not fear being disappointed. For I doubt not but History would make it appear, that from the first preaching of the Gospel to this day, there have been Christians in *Ju-*  
*dah*

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*dab* and *Jerusalem* who have sung this Song, i. e. glorified God in the use of this as well as other parts of Holy Scripture. And they might pronounce every verse of it as rationally and heartily as any former generations of the servants of God.

IF the strength of a city consists in the multitude of citizens, who live in sincere love and unanimity one towards another, they might well say in their very foundation at *Jerusalem*, we have a strong city: for we hear St. James the Apostle and first Bishop of *Jerusalem* telling St. Paul, *Acts* xxi. 20. that there were many thousands (it should be myriads, many ten thousands) of Jews who believed in Jesus. Many myriads could hardly amount to less than forty or fifty thousand of such converts. And the vigilant and gracious eye of God over them, was a greater security to them than walls and bulwarks. For when *Jerusalem* was to be destroyed by the Romans, a little before the destruction, by a special hand of Divine Providence the Christians were led out of the city, to a place called *Pella* beyond *Jordan*, and there remained in safety, as *Eusebius* writes, *Eccles. Hist. B. iii. c. 5.* *Epiphanius* says that they were warned by an Angel from God to do this; and that several years after, when the Roman Emperor *Hadrian* had repaired *Jerusalem*, they returned thither again. Then were the gates of that city opened, according to the words of my Text, that the righteous nation which kept the truth, might enter in.

AND since the coming of our blessed Lord, how eminently hath been fulfilled that saying of the Prophet to God, ver. 9. of this Song, *When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness?* For whether by Judgments we understand the Laws, Ordinances, and Works of God, contained in the sacred Books, as that word often imports, we can truly say with the

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the Apostle, *Their sound is long since gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world:* or whether we take Judgments in the common sense, for the dispensations of God's Providence in the government of the World, how plainly hath his arm been manifested under the reign of the *Messiah*, in vindicating his own cause, and punishing his enemies? So that they who obstinately shut their eyes, and would not see his hand when it was lifted up, have at last been forced to acknowledge it, and take shame to themselves for their envy at his People. 'Tis true indeed, some have remained hardened Infidels under the fullest manifestations of God's Mercies and Judgments, according to that which our Prophet foresaw in his Vision: *Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the Majesty of the Lord.* But notwithstanding this, since the Revelation of God by *Jesus Christ*, infinite numbers of mankind have learned that piety, holiness, and goodness in all manner of conversation, which was far from being known or practised in the World before his days. And the fatherly goodness, the gracious reconciliation, the loving-kindness of the Lord towards the children of men, hath been abundantly testified to them who before were accounted as aliens and enemies.

NOR must we conclude, when we hear the *Jews* infidelity complained of, that they were all Infidels, and Enemies to the Gospel of *Christ*. For we learn from that very Gospel, that *Jews* were the first Writers and Preachers of it, and Sufferers for it. We are taught by them how to interpret many ancient Prophecies relating to the *Messiah*. We have heard from the first acts of Christianity, that many myriads of them embraced it in its most tender infancy. They were the chief propagators  
of



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of it throughout the World, and the great instruments of gathering the *Gentiles* and the Dispersed of *Israel* into one Church under the banner of *Jesus Christ*, as *Isaiah* had prophesied.

WE are too sensible of the present hardness of that People, to dissemble it, and are sorry to find that many Christians in name, are no better in reality. But we do not pretend that the Kingdom of our Lord is yet compleat. We dayly pray for the farther perfection and glory of it, in the restoration of the Church from all the powers of darkness, and tyranny of sin and death, which was the *third* thing we proposed to consider.

THIS restoration of the Church under the reign of the *Messiah*, is much spoken of by our Prophet *Isaiah*: particularly xi. 9. he tells us, 'That the time was coming, when nothing should be left that could hurt or destroy in all God's holy Mountain,' alluding to mount *Sion*, which is a type of the whole Church of *Christ*. 'That in this Mountain, Chap. xxv. God shall destroy the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail spread over all nations: that he will swallow up death in victory, and wipe away tears from off all faces. That his dead servants, Ch. xxvi. shall rise again out of their graves, and live together with him. Therefore he calls upon them with a cheerful and pleasant voice, saying, Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out her dead. For the people shall dwell in *Sion* at *Jerusalem*: thou shalt weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee, at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee. And there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters. The light of the Moon also shall be as the light of the Sun: and  
the

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‘ the light of the Sun shall be sevenfold, as the  
‘ light of seven days, in the day that the Lord  
‘ bindeth up the breach of his People, and healeth  
‘ the stroke of their wound.’

THESE promises contain the most transcendent  
joys and felicities to be showred down upon the  
Kingdom of the *Messiah*, such as we have never  
yet known, or read of in any History. I pass  
over many Texts of like importance, and come  
to Ch. lx. which begins thus; *Arise, shine, for thy  
light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon  
thee.* From whence to the end of the Prophecy  
we have a description of such a *Sion* and *Jerusalem*,  
as might rival Heaven in brightness, security, and  
fulness of joy. ‘ Whereas thou hast been forsaken  
‘ and hated, so that no man went thro’ thee, I  
‘ will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of  
‘ many generations. Thou shalt suck the milk of  
‘ the *Gentiles*, and the breasts of Kings. Violence  
‘ shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor  
‘ destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt  
‘ call thy walls salvation, and thy gates praise.  
‘ The Sun shall no more be thy light by day, nor  
‘ the Moon by night: but the Lord shall be unto  
‘ thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glo-  
‘ ry. Thy people shall be all righteous; they shall  
‘ inherit the land for ever. A little one shall be-  
‘ come a thousand, and a small one a strong na-  
‘ tion.— I have set watchmen upon thy walls,  
‘ O *Jerusalem*, which shall never hold their peace  
‘ day nor night. I have proclaimed unto the end  
‘ of the World, say ye to the Daughter of *Sion*,  
‘ Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his re-  
‘ ward is with him, and his work before him. I  
‘ create new Heavens and a new Earth: and the  
‘ former shall not be remembred, nor come into  
‘ mind. I create *Jerusalem* a rejoycing, and her  
‘ people a joy. I will extend peace to her, like a  
‘ river,

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river, and the glory of the *Gentiles* like a flowing stream.

THUS far the Prophet *Isaiah* concerning the renovation and perfection of things in the Kingdom of the *Messiah*. To which correspond several expressions in the twenty-first and twenty-second Chapters of St. *John's Revelation*, where he affirms, that he saw a new Heaven and new Earth: and the Holy City, new *Jerusalem*, coming down from God, prepared as a Bride adorned for her Husband. And that he heard a voice out of Heaven, saying, *Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*

THESE Scriptures have induced several of the primitive Fathers of our Church to believe, that the City of *Jerusalem* and the Temple there shall be rebuilt, and that the land of *Judea* shall be the habitation of such *Jews* and *Gentiles* as shall constitute the Kingdom of the *Messiah* in the height of its glory. I will recite a few passages to this purpose out of some of their Books.

TRYPHO the Jew, in his Dialogue with *Justin Martyr*, asks, 'Do you Christians say, that *Jerusalem* shall be built again, and that your people shall be gathered together there, and rejoyce with *Christ*, together with the Patriarchs, Prophets, and those of our nation, or others made Profelytes before the coming of your *Christ* to Judgment; and that none of us Unbelievers shall have any Inheritance in the Holy Mount of God?' *Justin* affirms to him, 'That believing *Gentiles* shall then dwell in the Holy Mount, and that *Jews* shall acknowledge *Jesus* in the same place of *Jerusalem* where they had crucified him. For, says he, the Saints shall reign in *Jerusalem* rebuilt, adorned, and augmented; and  
' this



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‘*this* all orthodox Christians acknowledge: who  
 ‘therefore expect that *Christ* at his second com-  
 ‘ing will appear in *Jerusalem*.’ So says *Irenaeus*;  
 ‘In the days of the *Messiah*, *Jerusalem* shall be re-  
 ‘built, and the *Jews* shall be restored to the land  
 ‘which God gave to their Fathers’. ‘*Christ*, says  
 ‘*Lactantius*, shall build the Holy City, and there  
 ‘shall be the reign of the Just.’ *St. Barnabas* is  
 positive, ‘That the very Temple which was de-  
 ‘stroyed by their enemies, shall be gloriously re-  
 ‘built by their servants.’

THESE passages I have recited, not with any  
 design to discuss exactly the doctrine of them, but  
 only to shew the sense of Prophets, Apostles, and  
 Fathers of the Church, that there will be a more  
 perfect and glorious state of the Kingdom of  
*Christ*, than any that hath ever yet appeared in  
 the World. Which is the substance of my third  
 assertion. Tho’ I hardly think this to be the day  
 spoken of in my Text; because I presume this  
 State shall be so perfect, that none who is admit-  
 ted into it, will be guilty of what follows here, *viz.*  
 the abuse of the favour of God, and *dealing unjustly*  
*in this land of uprightness.*

I shall only add, by way of application, that  
 the righteousness which is necessary to fit us for  
 this State, will bring our present cities to the  
 nearest resemblance of it. For Heaven it self could  
 not be happy without it, and the felicities of this  
 world always hold a proportion to it. The more  
 righteous any city or nation is, so much the near-  
 er it approaches to Heaven, and hath the strong-  
 er title to the favour and protection of God. O my  
 people, says the Prophet *Micah*, remember now what  
*Balak King of Moab* consulted, and what *Balaam* the  
 son of *Beor* answered him, that ye may know the right-  
 eousness of the Lord. The consult was, how to  
 bring a Curse upon *Israel*. ‘There’s no such  
 ‘thing

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‘ thing can be done, says the Magician, except  
‘ you first seduce them from their allegiance to  
‘ their God.’ The King followed this advice, and  
so prevailed against them. For as soon as they  
were debauched, they became accursed. In both  
dispensations was seen *the righteousness of the Lord*;  
for he had covenanted to preserve them while obe-  
dient, and to punish them when they rebelled a-  
gainst him. And according to this method he al-  
ways treated them. Their temporal *Jerusalem* was  
made a type of the spiritual, an embleme of Hea-  
ven, from its first character, because it was once  
a holy and faithful city. As such it stood impreg-  
nable; God’s Salvation was its walls and bul-  
warks. *Pekah and Remaliab and Sennacherib*, men-  
tioned by our Prophet, attempted it in vain. But  
how, says *Isaiab*, *is the faithful city become an har-*  
*lot? It was full of judgment, righteousness lodged in*  
*it, but now murderers and workers of all iniquity.*  
*Therefore said the Lord of hosts, the mighty one of*  
*Israel; Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and*  
*avenge me of mine enemies. And I will turn my hand*  
*upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take*  
*away all thy tin.* This purging was effected by  
the fire of the *Chaldeans*, which consumed their  
houses and laid them in rubbish. Afterwards they  
were restored, and became again the *city of righ-*  
*teousness, the faithful city*; till losing this character  
a second time, they lost their City and Country  
to the *Romans*, which to this day they have not  
been able to recover again. Such a change of  
their fortune was made by the change of their  
manners.

W O U L D we be able to sing this Song in our  
Land, That we have strong cities? we must be  
qualified to go thro’ the other parts of it, and to  
profess that God is our strength, and that his bles-  
sing is our surest defence. We must not endure  
other

other Lords, who would pervert us from his fear, to have the dominion over us: we must not be so favourable to the wicked, as to encourage them in their impieties, and so partake with them in dishonouring and affronting the Divine Majesty: But we must wait upon God and serve him in that way of worship which he hath revealed to us. We must acknowledge that when he lifteth up his hand, he easily brings down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he lays it low, even to the ground, he brings it even to the dust. Let the desire of our Soul be to his Name; let us love him with all our heart, and seek his Kingdom and Righteousness above all things. Then may we put our whole trust in him, and cast our cares entirely upon him. Then will he ordain peace for us, and bring all our affairs to a good issue, thro' him whom he hath invested with all power in Heaven and Earth, the Prince of Peace, the Redeemer and Saviour of our Souls and Bodies, *Jesus Christ* our Lord, To whom &c.







# SERMON LV.

*On the Fourth Sunday in ADVENT.*



ISAIAH xxxii. i.

*Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness,  
and princes shall rule in judgment.*

**I**N the eight first verses of this Chapter is contained the description of a good King, who by his wise and gracious Government reforms the publick disorders of his Country, giving all due encouragement to Piety and Virtue, and effectually suppressing Atheism and Immorality. And because *Isaiab* speaks expressly of two good Kings, viz. *Hezekiab* who reigned in his own time, and *Messiah* whose coming into the world he foresaw, therefore Interpreters understand these words of both their Governments, the one as the type, the other as the antitype. Accordingly we will take occasion from hence to consider the character of a good King in general, and shew that our Lord *Jesus*, whom we acknowledge to be the *Messiah*, the King from Heaven, hath answered this character.

AND first, *A King*, says our Prophet, *shall reign in*, or as the *Hebrew* signifies, *for righteousness*: i. e. he shall be righteous in his own person, and such shall be his whole administration. This word *righteousness*, is of a very extensive signification; it imports the fulfilling of the whole Law of God; it includes our trust and affiance in him, that he will be with us and bless us in the performance of our duty, and the discharge of a good conscience. The righteous man, so highly celebrated and applauded in holy Scripture, is not only one who is true and just in all his dealings, diligent and faithful in that office, employment, or state of life, to which God hath called him; but he is likewise of a compassionate, charitable, and beneficent Spirit; he loves his neighbour as himself, and does unto all men the same things which he might reasonably wish and hope should be done to him, were he in their condition. He does not satisfy himself with the bare observance of human Laws, so far as that none may be able to charge him with any thing that is ill; but he studies moreover to abound in all those good works, which are the peculiar fruits of the Spirit of God, and which may demonstrate him to be one of God's children, sent into the world for the benefit and comfort of mankind. *The righteous*, says the holy Psalmist, xxxvii. *is ever merciful and liberal. His mouth is exercised in wisdom, and his tongue will be talking of judgment*, i. e. of such things as are pleasing to God, and profitable to the hearers. For which reason *Solomon* says, that *the tongue of the just is as choice silver*, that *his lips feed many*: that *by the blessing of the upright the city is exalted*; and that *when such are in authority, the citizens rejoice*. And *St. Paul* observes, *Rom. v.* that righteous men are generally so well beloved, that some might be found who would even lay down their lives for them.

AND

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AND thus much of the excellency of righteousness in general; which a good King will take care to advance in its utmost latitude. And indeed he is the likeliest man in his whole Kingdom to speed it well, and make it the delight of all his people. For his practice is the standard and fountain-head of their manners; which when it is enforced with the due administration of Laws, what an infinite deal of good must it needs produce?

SUCH a King we may justly presume *Hazekiah* to have been. For tho' his character is not branched out into all the particulars of righteousness which I have mentioned, yet that which the Scripture says of him in general, is sufficient to infer them all. 'Tis affirmed then of him, that he trusted in God, and adhered to him with all his heart, and departed not from following him, but kept all his commandments, doing that which was good and right in his eyes. The history of his Reformation of divine Worship from the corruptions which had overspread it, and the deliverances and blessings which God vouchsafed him thereupon, confirm the truth of this character. When it is said, *he put his trust in the Lord*, there is a great emphasis in this saying. For at the beginning of his reign, he had many difficulties and dangers to encounter, if he would do the part of a good King. Errors in Religion were, by inveterate custom, established for truth; and at the same time he was under the yoke of an idolatrous and victorious King, the King of *Assyria*. Notwithstanding, he soon rid himself both of the one and the other, because he trusted in God, that he would bless and protect him, as he did most effectually, in the way of his bounden duty.

THIS was great: And yet but a shadow of that righteousness which was to follow in the person



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son and reign of the *Messiah*; whom we confess to be our Lord *Jesus*. That he was to be a King, is implied in the very name; and the predictions thereof are too many and too well known to need recital. This King our Lord owned himself to be from first to last. *Rabbi*, said *Nathanael* to him at his first appearance in publick, *thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel*. Again, when he made his triumphant entry into *Jerusalem*, a little before his passion, it was done, say the Evangelists, to fulfil that prophecy which says, *Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass*. And when the Chief Priests and Scribes called out to him to silence the multitudes who sung *Hosanna's* to him upon this occasion, he answered, *I tell you, if these should hold their peace, the very stones would cry out, and testify the same thing*. Lastly, when *Pilate* urged him at his trial to declare, whether or no he were the *King of the Jews*, he answered in the affirmative, and added that he was born into the world for this very purpose, that he might *bear witness to the truth*, i. e. that he might reign in righteousness.

THAT he so reigns, is as evident, as that he is a King. In his Person he fulfilled it: in his Doctrine he taught it. At the very beginning of which he apprizes his hearers, that their righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, and he shews them directly several cases wherein it must exceed. Several cases wherein the glory of God, and the good of mankind were highly concerned. Thus he began to repair the breaches of both Tables of the sacred Decalogue. And with a merit superior to that of any other Reformer.

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DID *Hezekiah* reform in difficult times? He had however a Kingdom in this World, a Crown and Dignity to support him in it. But our Lord set about this work under greater disadvantages. *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.* He found his Throne, his Temple, his *Jerusalem*, all possessed by those who were his implacable enemies. *Herod* and *Pontius Pilate*, Priests, Scribes and Pharisees, derided him, blasphemed him, crucified him, and yet in the end he conquered them all. Foreseeing this, he addressed himself to his reformation with intrepidity, and reprov'd the reigning enormities without respect of persons, which with us would have been called, flying in the face of Government. Perhaps we should have called it so in him, had we been his Countrymen and Contemporaries. Perhaps they that said so, called it by some such name. But this did not hinder him from prosecuting the work which he came to do in the world. He knew the goodness of it, and trusted God for the success. I speak of him as a man, and as the Prophets speak of him in that capacity. So prays *David* in the person of the *Messiah*, *Psal. xxii. Be not thou far from me, O Lord: thou art my strength; haste thee to help me.* So speaks *Isaiab* of him, chap. liii. *The Lord who was pleased to bruise him, shall prolong his days, and prosper the work in his hands.* So says our Lord of himself, *John v. I can of my self do nothing.* And chap. ix. *I must work the works of him that sent me.* And chap. xi. *I thank thee, O father, that thou hast heard me: and I knew that thou hearest me always.* It was the Kingdom of God which he came to erect among men, and therefore agreeable to that general Law of justice, that he should obey God rather than men. This Kingdom had been given him by many ancient prophecies, particularly that eminent one in the second *Psalms*, that

tho' the Kings of the Earth stood up, and the Rulers took counsel against him, yet he should be established upon the holy Hill of *Sion*. And therefore, as I noted before, he came unto his own; he was Lord of the Temple, it was his Father's house; he had a right to cleanse it and reform it, as he did.

AGAIN, did *Hezekiah* shake off the oppressive yoke of the King of *Affyria*? Our Lord rescued his Kingdom from the tyranny of Sin and *Satan*, into the glorious liberty of the Sons of God. Sin and *Satan* had so far deluded poor mortals, as to get the dominion over them, in the exercise of which they afflicted them with all sorts of calamities both of body and mind. For their work is drudgery, and their wages death. In order to redeem us from these calamities, he recalls us to a serious obedience of God's Laws; to love him with all our heart and soul and strength and mind, and our neighbours as our selves. Which is the sure and only way to true happiness. For without the love of God, we cannot have the benefit of his protection; and wanting his protection, how much worse than nothing are these helpless bodies and souls of ours? Wanting him, we are all nakedness without, and darkness within. Every creature, visible and invisible, from the greatest to the smallest, is able to torment us and destroy us.

BUT if God be for us, none of them can be against us so as to hurt us, for they are all entirely subject to him, and necessarily obey his voice. The truth of this our Lord has demonstrated to us, by casting out Devils, healing the sick, raising the dead, stilling the winds and seas, and doing every thing for the good of mankind, with the bare word of his mouth. Whereby he proved himself to be a King indeed; and taught



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us at the same time to secure to our selves the love and favour of God, by praying to him, worshipping him, and keeping his commandments, and then to fear nothing, for nothing can hurt us.

WITH respect to the things about us, he hath taught us many lessons very contrary to the prevailing opinions of mankind; as, that our life and happiness consist not in the abundance of good things which we possess, but much rather in acts of beneficence and humanity, in shewing our selves hospitable, friendly, and charitable to all men, as occasion shall require. That when we have done our best to oblige and benefit mankind, we must expect much ingratitude and unsuitable treatment both in word and deed. That it will not help our selves, to hurt them, nor make us a just amends to requite them in their own way: But that to love them that hate us, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that despitefully use us, is the most likely way to put an end to their hatred, and to procure that peace and love which is absolutely necessary for the happiness of the world. That possibly by such a conduct we may overcome evil with good: At least we shall approve our selves to be the children of him who is kind to the unthankful and unholy, and entitle our selves to his favour and reward in a future state. With respect to the esteem, honours, and preferments in the world, he has taught us not to be assuming, not to aspire above others, that we may lord it over them: Not to thrust our selves ambitiously into any place, dignity, or business, before we have a proper call to it. This is the advice which he gave to his contending Disciples: 'When you are bidden to a feast, sit down at the lower end; and strive not for the highest stations in my Kingdom. But whoso-

‘ever will be great among you, shall be your Minister. And whoever of you will be chief, let him be servant of all. Even as I came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. And if I, your Lord and Master, have condescended to do the lowest services for you, ye ought to do the same one for another.’

FINALLY, with respect to our selves, our Lord has rectified those false opinions which we are apt to entertain concerning pleasures: Assuring us, that the way to happiness is straight and narrow; that not he who indulges, but he who restrains and mortifies his sensual cravings, is the happy man. That we should lay up our treasure in the Kingdom of Heaven, and hunger and thirst for the joys of it, more than for any thing which this world can afford. That those who mourn now, shall there receive the greatest comfort; they that humble themselves now, shall there be most highly exalted; they that deny themselves the pomps and vanities of this world, shall shine there in the brightest glory. That if we lay down our life for God’s sake, we cannot lose it, because he is the fountain of life, and will raise us from this weak, transitory, mortal state, to live for ever in perfect health and vigour in his own presence and heavenly Kingdom.

THUS does our Lord reign in righteousness, by the just title and claim which he has to our Obedience, by the redemption from Sin and Satan, which he hath wrought for us, by the wholesome laws which he hath enacted for our Government, by the reasonable service which he demands of us, by the protection and comfort which he now affords us, and by the exceeding great rewards which he has prepared for us.

It follows in my Text, *And princes shall rule in judgment.* Who indeed are necessary concomitants

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cants of a righteous King's reign, to extend the benefits of it. For by *Princes* here, we understand subordinate Magistrates and Officers, who act under the King in executing the Laws, and watching over the People. And as the natural body of man, tho' otherwise vigorous, is much hindered in its actions, if it be lame in the hands or feet: So the body politick can never be well governed, notwithstanding the goodness of the Head, if it be deficient in subordinate Magistrates and Ministers. With a view to such a constitution I suppose it was, that *Plato* wishes *Kings* would be conversant with *Philosophers*; by whom no doubt he means such as we now call wise and faithful Counsellors, who should be ready to assist him in all affairs of Government which might want good advice, and be his Monitors to recover him from any wrong way which he might happen to take.

To the same purpose is the advice of *Isocrates* the *Athenian* Orator to a King of his Acquaintance, touching his conduct in Government. 'Do not, says he, promiscuously admit for your friends, all those that are ambitious to be such; but those only that are worthy your genius: Not those with whom you may pass the time most pleasantly, but those by whose assistance you may best administer your Government.—Appoint such persons for the discharge of Employments which you cannot execute your self, as you are persuaded will answer your expectation, since you will be sure to be accountable for their actions.—Esteem those men as your best confidants, not who shall applaud all that you say or do, but who shall be ready to apprise you of any error in your Government.—Give liberty of speech to the prudent and wise, that you may have the benefit of their examination and discussion



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cussion of those matters, which may prove too difficult for you.—— Do not reckon those to be wise men, that are nice canvassers of minute and trifling matters; but those that can speak to the purpose in affairs of the greatest weight and moment.—— Distinguish and make much of the men of parts, that can see a great deal farther than the rest: Knowing that an able and faithful Counsellor, is the most useful treasure that a King can be possessed of. Lastly, conclude them to be most likely to enlarge your Dominions, who are most capable of improving your mind.' Thus far *Iso-*  
*crates.*

AND whereas he recommends to his King's perusal the grave maxims of *Hesiod*, *Theognis*, and other *Greek* Writers, as excellent instructions for the conduct of human life in all circumstances, I doubt not but he would much rather have recommended those sacred Oracles which are written for our learning in the word of God, had he been acquainted with them. For they are indicated by the Spirit of that God, by whom Kings reign, and Princes decree justice: who stands in their congregations, and calls upon them to defend the poor, the fatherless, and the widow; to see that such as are in need and necessity, have right done them.

WHEN Kings reign agreeably to this word, and Princes rule by the Laws, Statutes, and Judgments of this God, then will certainly be fulfilled that which follows my Text in this Chapter, that *the people will find an hiding-place from the wind, a covert from the storm: rivers of waters in dry places, and shadows in a weary land*, i. e. under such a Government those who were formerly oppressed, shall be relieved, unrighteous Magistrates shall be removed, wrongful dealings for the future

ture shall be prevented: Which will be as welcome to the poor people, as the refuge of a covert, streams of water, and shades are to travellers in a parched land.

*THEN* the eyes of the seers shall not be dim: and the ears of the hearers shall hearken. The Prophets, who are called Seers, shall have clearer visions of the Will of God; and the People shall be more tractable and attentive to hear them. The heart also of the rash and foolish shall understand knowledge: and the tongue of the stammerer shall be loosed to speak plainly. False Prophets shall be silenced and removed out of the way, that they may no longer mis-lead the simple, illiterate people; and the teachers of truth shall have their tongue at liberty, to preach the word of God freely and impartially, as they ought to preach it. The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful; or, as our old translation has it, the niggard shall not pass for a gentleman. These are brief and general hints of the reformation of manners which should be wrought under *Hazekiah* and other good Kings: when care should be taken to prevent bribery and corruption in Magistrates and Courts of Justice: when a high title and splendid appearance should no longer set the stamp of lawful authority upon wicked practices: when the houses of vanity and corruption should be shut up, and cease to fill the minds of people with idle and hurtful amusements, and leave them free to attend upon matters of more serious and substantial consideration. In short, when piety and virtue should have their due rewards and encouragements, and all iniquity be treated as the pest of society, and the canker of all publick good.

*THIS* Government is very much to the pleasure of the most High, who delights to see loving-kindness,

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kindness, judgment, and righteousness exercised in the Earth; and it is well suited to the condition of men who are created after the Image of God, and are capable of improving this Image by a strict discipline of piety and virtue, so as to be advanced in time to his more immediate presence in his heavenly Kingdom. A sample of this Government was given by *Hezekiah*, but the perfection of it was reserved for the *Messiah's* reign, whose royal character we have seen before; and his all-sufficient Power is well known, by his opening the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf, and causing the tongue of the stammerers to speak plainly; Which he performed in the literal, but much more amply in the spiritual sense. For in the first capacity, as a bodily healer, he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of *Israel*; but as a spiritual Physician he has opened the eyes and ears of mankind in general. His righteousness hath been universally manifested in the sight of the Heathen. His Spirit inspired ignorant men with the gift of various tongues, to publish his excellent Laws in a most intelligible manner to people of all Nations and Languages; so that *all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God*. The same Spirit has opened the hearts of all orders of men to receive these Laws, and warmed them with zeal to erect Schools and Churches where all sorts of people might be instructed in them throughout all generations. Their hearts and heads, which would have been stupidly ignorant, are now full of the knowledge of the Lord. Their eyes see, their ears hear, their tongues speak of those heavenly things, to which by nature they were blind, and deaf, and dumb.

WE cannot look upon the progress which the Gospel has had in the world, but we must behold this King reigning in Righteousness, and the  
Princes



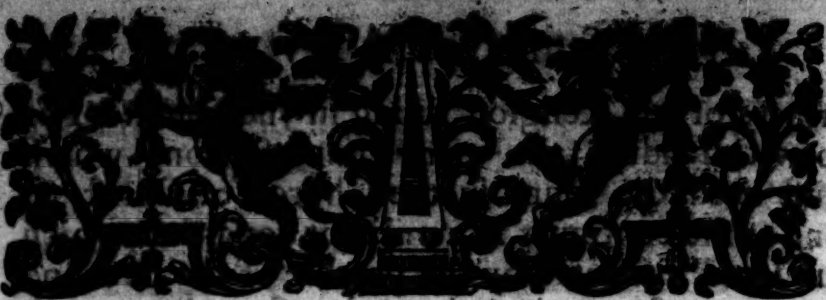
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Princes of his Religion ruling in Judgment. For notwithstanding the many imperfections which must needs be found in the Church of Christ, so long as she continues in a militant condition, which our Lord intimated by the parable of the tares and wheat; most certain it is, and easy to be proved, that all Nations where Christianity has prevailed, have been much benefited by it, even in their temporal and politick capacity. The spirit of truth, loving-kindness and charity which it propagates, where-ever its doctrines are duly inculcated and regarded, has undeniably produced, and is daily producing, abundance of good fruits. Which all considerate Princes have acknowledged, and took suitable care for the cherishing of the root. Particularly King *James I.* in those rules of Government which he writ for the use of his son, charges him to see, 'that all Churches of his Dominions were supplied with good Ministers, that he should have an eye to the maintenance of Schools and Places of virtuous Education, and take care to defend the Doctrines and Discipline of Christianity according to the word of God.'

MAY all Christian Princes, and all Magistrates and Ministers under them, make this word the rule and measure of their Lives and Government. Then may we hope to see those happy days which the Prophets and Apostles saw with an eye of faith in their spiritual Visions, *When all the Kingdoms of the world shall become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ: To whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever.*



SERMON



# SERMON LVI.

ON CHRISTMAS-DAY.



ISAIAH vii. 14.

*Behold, a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

**I**N the former part of this Chapter, we are told of a great distress which *Abaz* King of *Judah* was in from *Rezin* King of *Syria*, and *Pekab* King of *Israel*, who were entred into a confederacy against *Judah*, and had destroyed and carried away captive abundance of men and women, as you may see 2 *Kings* xvi. 2 *Chron* xxviii. In which they were the Executioners of God's wrath upon King *Abaz* for his abominable Idolatries, as it is there affirmed. But when he and his Counsellors were in the utmost consternation upon a report that the confederate army was marching to besiege *Jerusalem*, so that their hearts were moved, as the trees of the wood with the wind; and as they were taking a view of the city-walls, to see what condition they were in for a siege, God sends the

the Prophet *Iſaiah* to them, with a comfortable message to assure them, that their Enemies should prevail no farther against them. And this he offers to confirm with a Miracle, which he submits to *Abaz* to chuse what it should be: but when *Abaz* refused to name any thing, either out of contempt of the Prophet, or diffidence of God's mercy whom he had forsaken, the Prophet no longer applies to him in particular; but calls upon the whole House of *David* to take notice, that God of his own free grace, and without their asking, would give them a sign, which should be this, That a *Virgin* should conceive, and bear a Son, and should call his name *Immanuel*.

IN WHICH words were undoubtedly understood by the ancient *Jews* to denote the Conception and Birth of the *Messiah*. For tho' the application of them to that event, is not to be found at this day in their *Targum*, *Talmud*, or *Rabboth*; yet St. *Matthew*, who was himself a *Jew*, and wrote his Gospel chiefly for the instruction of *Jews*, quotes it in his first Chapter as fulfilled at the Nativity of *Christ*; which he would not have done, if it had not been the received Doctrine of those times, that this Prophecy concerned the *Messiah*.

As to the *Targum*, or *Jewish* Commentary upon the Prophets, it is the opinion of learned men, that several passages which were formerly in it, are now left out by the Modern *Jews*, that they might not give advantage to the Christian Cause. Which passages they might omit with the greater security, because there are but few Centuries past, since such Writings were entirely in their own possession. However, some Sayings there are, still extant in their Writings, which agree well with this of the Prophet, as we shall see hereafter. But to return.



It may be demanded, why these words were spoken to *Abaz*, and what comfort they could afford to him at this time. Commentators are at a loss how to make out the connexion between this Sign, and the impending danger which I just now mentioned. For how could a miraculous Birth, which was not to happen till six hundred years after, be a proper sign of deliverance to the House of *David* in the present distress? For, in the orderly course of things, the sign ought to go before the thing signified, and a demonstration of God's power should be given, before the afflicted party can faithfully apprehend it, and rely upon it.

BUT yet a little consideration may clear up this difficulty, and that which is too concise for us in the Prophet's language, tho' plain enough for the time and place it was spoken in, may bear this sense in our more copious manner of speaking:

- That God had a great work to do in the House
- of *David*; that out of it a Virgin should arise;
- who still remaining a pure Virgin, should bring
- forth the *Messiah*, the Son of God into the
- World. And therefore it was a sure sign and
- token, that no adverse power should destroy this
- Family, till this signal event was accomplished
- in it.

THE promises of the *Messiah* were generally known in *Jerusalem*, and that he should spring from the root of *Jesse*. But idolatrous *Abaz*, like other revolvers from God, had lost his courage and understanding together with his religion. He had no faith, wretched man, to comfort himself with such promises. He could think of nothing, high nor low, which could deliver him from the arms of his victorious Enemies. Therefore God himself by his Prophet suggests this Oracle to him, as a sure anchor for him to rest upon. It was an eternal Decree, not to be contravened by

any power upon Earth. *Abaz* might have asked in the height above, Fire from Heaven, as *Elijah* did, to consume his Enemies; or in the depth beneath, the Earth to have opened and swallowed them up, as in the case of *Korab* and his company: and God could have wrought either of these signs by second causes. But the Conception and Birth of *Immanuel* was a sign which none but the Lord himself could give, even by giving himself to be so conceived and born.

Now to this Interpretation of ours, the Modern *Jews*, and their friends the Deists, who envy us any prophecy that favours our Religion, make four objections.

THE First is to the word, which we translate *Virgin*; they pretend that the Original does not necessarily signify such a one, but any young woman, even in a married state: and they undertake to give an instance of this general meaning from *Prov. xxx. 19.* which I believe none but themselves will allow to conclude the point as they would have it. However, as to its signification in this place, all our Writers down from *Justin Martyr* have answered them, that their own men both for Country and Religion, the LXXII Interpreters, have translated this word by the Greek *παρθένη*, which strictly signifies a *Virgin*: now they living near three hundred years before the Nativity of our Lord, could have no design to favour our cause by such translation, and therefore must needs be allowed as impartial evidence for us.

BESIDE, the design of the Prophet here, plainly obliges us to take the word in this sense. For where is the sign or miracle for a young woman to conceive, except only upon supposition that she is even then a pure Virgin? This we say hath happened but once in the World, in conse-

quence of this Prophecy, and by virtue of a Divine Power; and was therefore a true and proper Miracle; but our adversaries interpretation leaves nothing signal or miraculous in this prediction.

*Secondly*, They object, that the accomplishment of this prophecy is restrained by the context to such an infant as is wholly of the common species of mankind. For it immediately follows, *Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil and chuse the good: i.e.* he shall be nursed and grow like other children, so as to advance from weakness to strength, and from ignorance to knowledge. And we admit that he did so. But if they argue, that such person could not be the Son of God in our sense, we deny the consequence; for we hold that our Lord was improvable in his human nature, and at several ages had several degrees both of bodily strength, and spiritual knowledge, according to that of St. Luke, who affirms, that *Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.* For tho' his humanity was always sanctified and dignified with the conjunction of the Divine Nature, yet the Divinity did not always manifest and exert itself with equal fulness, but only in proportion to the exigences of his ministry. And because it was no part of his ministry to inform mankind of the precise time of the last Judgment, therefore he owns that this day was known only to the Father, and not communicated to him as the *Messiah*. In which capacity, tho' he never wanted the Divine Power to enable him to perform whatever he saw fit, yet the work of our redemption obliged him to submit to all the infirmities of our nature, sin only excepted; and consequently he passed thro' the stages of helpless infancy and tender childhood, as well as other men.



THE objection then, that the Child here promised to be given for a Sign, should eat butter and honey, *i. e.* be fed and nursed, and improve in understanding like other children, is no manner of prejudice to our Christian sense of the words of my Text, that the Child here promised is the *Messiah*. But indeed this same sense must needs be carried thro' the context, to render it pertinent and fit to be subjoyned. For to what purpose should the Prophet observe of a Child that was merely human, that he must be nursed and grow some time, before he could distinguish between good and evil? This is so well understood by every woman, that it would be a very superfluous and trifling observation. But take it as a continuation of the sign which he had begun to speak of, that a Child so wonderfully conceived and born, of such Divine Original as to be *Immanuel*, God with Man, should be subjected to the infirmities common to other children, this indeed is very astonishing, what our understanding could never have discovered, and therefore very fit to be foretold us by a wise and holy Prophet.

IN the *Third* place our Adversaries say, that the accomplishment of this Prophecy is restrained to the time wherein it was spoken, by this following Verse, which says, that *before this child should know to refuse the evil and chuse the good, the land which Abaz abhorred, should be forsaken of both her Kings, i. e.* of Rezin King of Syria, and Pekah King of Israel, mentioned before.

AND true it is, that the destruction of these Kings is limited to as short a time as the infancy of a child. But then it does not follow from hence, that this individual Child here promised, should be born into the World before their destruction. For we must observe, that of all the Prophets which have spoken of the *Messiah*, Da-

*niel* first determined the time of his appearing, a circumstance which *Isaiab* and several others were ignorant of; and that without any disparagement to their predictions of him; for they spoke as they were taught by the Spirit of God, who did not think fit to reveal the time of his appearing to them. For which reason some of them hoped to see him in their own days, according to that Saying of our Lord, that *many Prophets and Kings desired to see the coming of the son of man. Isaiab* prays for it, Chap. lxiv. *Oh that thou wouldst bow the Heavens, and come down;* but not knowing when it would happen, he speaks here upon supposition, that in case the Child here promised, were immediately conceived, yet before he should be old enough *to know good and evil, i. e.* to express his liking or dislike of such things as children are concerned with, the two Kings before mentioned should be cut off from the face of the earth. And this indeed was punctually fulfilled. For in about three years after this Prophecy, *Rezin* fell in a war which he had with the *Affyrians*, and *Pekah* was slain by a conspiracy of *Hoshea*, who reigned in his stead, as we read 2 *Kings* xv, xvi.

AND now we may sum up the argument which the Prophet offers for the consolation of the House of *David*, thus: ‘Fear not, House of *David*, be not afraid of those who threaten to extirpate you: For God has a great work still remaining to be done in your Family: out of which a Virgin shall arise, who continuing such shall conceive and bring forth a Son, who shall be God and Man in one person. But yet you must not expect that he shall presently shew forth the power of his Divine Nature; for he shall be subject in his infancy to the same infirmities, and require the same treatment as other children. And tho’ I cannot inform you what time he shall

shall be born, yet this I am commissioned to assure you, that if he were to be conceived immediately, these two Kings, *Rezin* and *Pekah*, shall be cut off, before he can arrive to the knowledge of good and evil.

THIS, I think, is a just paraphrase upon the words of the Prophet, and shews that they contain a clear promise of the *Messiah*, and a very good ground of encouragement to the House of *David* to hope for deliverance from their present Invaders.

BUT *Fourthly*, The Modern *Jews* pretend, that this Prophecy was actually accomplished in the birth of some other child. Some of them will have it fulfilled in *Hezekiah* the Son of *Abaz*. But as they are generally bad Chronologers, so here they are sadly out in point of time; for *Hezekiah* being twenty five years old when *Abaz* was but thirty six, he must be twelve years old at least, when this Prophecy was delivered; and the small difference of age between him and *Abaz*, hath inclined some to think, that he was not his Son by nature, but only by adoption: But this is contrary to Scripture. Other *Jews* will have the Child here promised, to be *Isaiab's* own Son, by his wife mentioned in the next Chapter: which we cannot allow of; for then there would be no sign or miracle in his production, which yet is the very thing intended by it. *She shall call his name Immanuel.*

AND this leads us to enquire what sort of person the *Jews* expected their *Messiah* should be; and whether they had the same opinion of his Deity as we have. *What think you of Christ*, said our Lord to the Scribes and Pharisees, *whose Son is he?* They answered, *The Son of David.* *Why then*, says he, *does David call him Lord; saying, the Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy foot-stool.* If *David* call him



him Lord, how is he his Son? And they were not able to answer him a word. Which shews they did not acknowledge that the *Messiah* should be the Son of God in the sense we confess him: otherwise it had been obvious for them to answer, as any Christian would have done, that Christ in his Divine Nature, as he was God, was *David's* Lord; and as he was Man, he was his Son. And this indeed was the only way of solving the difficulty; which they not apprehending, were put to silence.

BUT these were Scribes and Pharisees, men bigotted to superstitious and ill-grounded Traditions, in the rubbish of which they had buried the genuine sense of the sacred Text, and had figured to themselves such a *Messiah* as was to be no other than a meer human Heroe.

ON the contrary, the *Psalms* and the Prophets plainly discover his Divine Nature to every one that reads them with an impartial eye. *Isaiah* in my Text says, *he shall be called Immanuel*, which in the sacred language is equivalent to this, *He shall be Immanuel*, God with us, God in our nature and likeness. And presently in his ninth Chapter he cries out in his prophetic ecstasie, as if he had actually seen him incarnate, 'Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the Government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the Increase of his Government and Peace there shall be no end, upon the Throne of *David* and upon his Kingdom, to order it and to establish it with Judgment and with Justice from henceforth even for ever.'

To the same purpose the Prophet *Jeremiah* speaks, Chap. xxiii. 5. Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto *David* a  
right.

‘righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and  
‘prosper, and shall execute Judgment and Justice  
‘in the Earth. In his days *Judah* shall be saved,  
‘and *Israel* shall dwell safely. And this is his  
‘name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD  
‘OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

I produce but a short specimen of those many Prophecies which foretold that the *Messiah* should have a divine as well as a human nature. Several of them are already applied to this purpose by our Lord and his Apostles in their disputes with the *Jews*. That passage in the second Psalm, *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee*, is greater, as St. Paul to the *Hebrews* observes, than any thing that was ever said to Angels or Men, who notwithstanding are sometimes called *the Sons of God*, but in a sense far inferior to this Son, whose Throne is said to endure for ever and ever, which justifies our doctrine of him, that *he is God of the substance of his Father, begotten, not made, and has neither beginning of days, nor end of time.*

THE Envy of the Modern *Jews*, which carries them to oppose us in every thing relating to the *Messiah*, emboldens them at the same time to contradict their best Interpreters in this Article of *Christ's* Divinity. For we have reason to believe, that their Commentators before *Christ* unanimously understood the Prophets as we do. Besides their gloss upon the Texts I have already mentioned, and several others, wherein they plainly declare their Belief, that the *Messiah* should be God as well as Man, they have left us evidences of the same Faith, in those few Writings which we have been able to rescue from the concealment or corruptions of their Successors. A Commentator on the *Psalms* (as quoted by *P. Mornay*) hath this passage; ‘Whereas the *Gentiles* are always de-

‘ manding of us, *where is your God?* Let them  
 ‘ know, that the time will come when God shall  
 ‘ sit among his People, so that they shall be able  
 ‘ to point him out with their finger.’ Another  
 saith, ‘ That the Everlasting shall one day be as  
 ‘ a Brother to Jacob, according to that of the  
 ‘ Canticles, *Oh that thou wast to me as a Brother:*  
 ‘ and that he shall come in person to espouse his  
 ‘ Church to himself:’ exactly according to our  
 Christian Doctrine.

As to the manner of his Incarnation, the *Cab-*  
*balists* are as refined as we can imagine. *Rabbi*  
*Simeon Ben Johai* in his Commentary upon *Genesis*,  
 says, ‘ That the Mercy of the Lord shall take  
 ‘ a body in the womb of a woman: and that by  
 ‘ the intervention of this same Holy Body, the  
 ‘ superior and inferior World shall be united  
 ‘ together; so that God shall be sanctified on  
 ‘ Earth as he is in Heaven, and the Gifts of the  
 ‘ Holy Ghost plentifully poured out upon men.  
 ‘ And briefly, that the Woman of whom the  
 ‘ Holy Word should take his Body, shall be  
 ‘ blessed and holy above all other Women.’  
*R. Berechia* says, ‘ The Birth of the *Messiah* alone  
 ‘ shall be without any defect.’ Another says,  
 ‘ He shall not come into the World like other  
 ‘ creatures; none shall know the name of his Fa-  
 ‘ ther, till he declares it.’ And finally, a *Jewish*  
 Commentator upon *Isaiah ix.* where *Christ* is cal-  
 led, *the Everlasting*, hath these words: ‘ In the  
 ‘ *Messiah* are two Natures or Sonships; one as he  
 ‘ is the Son of God; the other as he is the Son  
 ‘ of a Prophetess. Both these Natures shall re-  
 ‘ main distinct, and yet make but one *Christ*.  
 Now this is as full to our point as we can wish.  
 No Christian of us all can speak better of the  
 eternal generation of the Son of God, and his im-  
 maculate conception as the *Messiah*, than these

*Jewish*



*Jewish* Commentators I have cited. So that I need not produce more of them to prove, that what we teach of the Divine Nature of Christ, is consistent both with the Holy Prophets and ancient Rabbies; that from them we derive this Faith; and that the latter *Jews*, who take another way in interpreting the Prophets, do it in defiance to the sense of their progenitors, only to gratifie their spleen and impotent malice against Christians.

I shall only add, for farther confirmation of what hath been said, that notwithstanding the corrupt doctrines of the Scribes and Pharisees in our Saviour's days, yet even then we find *Jews* in the Gospel, who interpreted the Prophecies concerning the *Messiah*, as we do, and owned them to be accomplished in our Lord. When *Nathaniel* was first introduced to him, and observed his Divine Wisdom and Knowledge, he frankly confesses, *Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel.* St. *Peter* afterwards joyns the Christ, i. e. the *Messiah*, and the Son of God together, in his famous confession of our Lord. I meddle not with the Sayings of *John the Baptist*, nor any thing in the Writings of the Apostles: I am only observing what notion they had of the *Messiah* as *Jews*, and which they brought with them, when they first came to *Jesus*. And it plainly appears by their confessions, that they agreed with the Prophet *Isaiah*, and acknowledged him to be *Immanuel*, God and Man in one person.

LET us now for a conclusion briefly touch upon the blessings which accrue to us from this alliance which God hath contracted with our nature. And to this contemplation the Prophet fairly leads us in this same Chapter. For in *Abaz* we may see our own woful condition by nature.

While

While he and his men stood trembling like leaves before two confederate Kings, who had given them dreadful experiments of their ability to destroy them, *Isaiah* comes from God to encourage them with a Sign, that it was his good pleasure to deliver them. Even so we were long under the ravage and tyranny of a triple alliance, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil against us: each of which was singly an overmatch for us; how much less were we able to withstand their united forces! And while we became a prey to their teeth, and were led captive by them at their will, having neither power to help ourselves, nor a due sense of our misery; the Lord himself found out a way for our rescue, this very way here intimated by the Prophet, in sending *Immanuel*, his own Son, to be the Captain of our Salvation, thro' whose almighty Alliance we can now be more than Conquerors over all our Enemies.

FOR now we have an infallible sign and pledge, since he hath taken our nature upon him, that it is his pleasure to deliver us from all the miseries of our fallen, undone condition, into the glorious liberty of the Sons of God. As a farther sign of this, he hath distinguished himself by the name of the Saviour and Redeemer of Mankind, and declares that he was manifested for this purpose, that he might destroy Sin and Death, the Works of the Devil, *that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

LET us then gather under his Banner, follow his steps, hear his voice, and he will lead us to certain victory and triumph. We have seen the signs of the Son of Man, and know that he hath been declared the Son of God by the Heavenly Powers. We have seen and heard the communications of his divine love to us, in his holy days, in his Gospel, in his Church, in his Sacraments.

In

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In all these we see *Immanuel*, God with us; and in making a right use of all these, we shall one day see our selves with God, clothed with his immortality, invested with his righteousness, shining in his glory, in that Heaven of Heavens to which he hath exalted our nature in his own Body, and where he liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God World without end.



In the year of King James  
first, James I. of Great Brittain, came  
Gennet's King of Scots against the  
Cities of York, and in those days  
lay my Text, was executed sick. So  
that rich two calamities of war and sickness  
came upon James in the same year. For he  
reigned twenty-nine years, and his reign being  
lengthened above years from that time, it is plain  
that he fell sick in the same year of his reign.  
**SERMON**





# SERMON LVII.

*On the First Sunday after CHRIST-  
MAS-DAY.*



ISAIAH xxxviii. i.

*In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death:  
and Isaiah the prophet the son of Amos  
came unto him, and said unto him: Thus  
saith the Lord, Set thine house in order;  
for thou shalt die, and not live.*

**I**N the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, says the sacred Historian, came Sennacherib King of Assyria against the Cities of Judah: And in those days, says my Text, was Hezekiah sick. So that these two calamities, of war and sickness, came upon Hezekiah in the same year. For he reigned twenty-nine years, and his reign being lengthened fifteen years from this time, it is plain that he fell sick in the same year of Sennacherib's invasion, *i. e.* in the fourteenth year of his reign.

BUT

But it is a question amongst Commentators, whether the invasion or the sickness happened first, or both at the same time. Great Criticks think that they came together, which they conclude from verse 6 of this chap. where God assures the King by his Prophet, that he will deliver him and his City out of the hands of the *Affyrians*. This Assurance might be given to the King and his People, to comfort them against any farther attempts which the *Affyrians* might make upon them. And so we may take the narrative of *Hezekiah's* sickness in the order wherein it stands, so as to follow the destruction of the *Affyrian* army. But it is of little moment whether they came together or apart; only we must say that they happened in the same year.

Now this sickness was very grievous, upon several accounts;

First, For the nature of the disease, which is supposed to have been pestilential; for it was attended with a very painful swelling: By reason whereof *Hezekiah* complains that he had no rest night nor day: That his bones felt as if they were all broken: That he chattered like a crane or a swallow, and mourned like a dove, and was not able to lift up his eyes, they were so oppressed with heaviness.

Secondly, The pain of his distemper was aggravated with the sentence which the Prophet passed upon him in the name of God; for *Isaiah* made him a visit upon this occasion, to acquaint him, that it was the divine Will and Pleasure that he should continue no longer in this life, and to advise him accordingly to settle his affairs, to make his will, and appoint his successor. So that *Hezekiah* had nothing to do, but to consider himself as a dying man; the hope of recovery, which very much contributes to the cure of any distemper,

per, was taken away from him. He concluded, as he tells us, that his days were cut off; that he was going directly to the gates of the grave; that he should not see the Lord in the land of the living, nor behold man any more with the inhabitants of the world.

Thirdly, **HEZEKIAH's** sickness and sentence of death were embittered with this consideration, that he was going to be cut off in the strength of his age; for he was not yet forty years old. And therefore he complained that he should be deprived of the residue of his years, which by the ordinary course of nature he might have lived. This shortning of life was always esteemed as one of the calamities of our mortal condition; especially in so high and happy a station as that of a King. David prayed against it, saying, *O my God, take me not away in the midst of my age.* We doubt not but death, whenever it happens, translates every good man from this life to a better. But if our reward shall be proportioned to the work which we do on this side the grave, we have reason, with humble submission to the will of God, to desire that he would grant us time and space for the accomplishing of any good work.

Fourthly, **THAT** which made **Hezekiah** more loath to leave the world at this time was, that he had no child to succeed him in his Throne. It is probable that at this time he was neither father nor husband. But it is certain that his successor was not born till three years after. Now when a man has an estate and honour to leave his children, it is one part of infelicity to have no child to leave for such inheritance. And it was much more so in the case of the Kings of Judah, who had singular blessings entailed upon their posterity by many ancient Prophecies and Promises of God.



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THIS is now what the reasons which aggravated *Hezekiah's* pains in his sickness, and made him desirous to continue longer in this life. And therefore when he heard his doom from the mouth of *Isaiab*, he turned his face towards the wall, and put up an earnest petition to God, that he would be pleased to recall his sentence, and rescue his soul from the pit of corruption, that he might yet be a father of children, and make known to them the loving-kindness of the Lord. This request he enforces with the following arguments.

*First*, He begs of God to remember how he had walked before him hitherto in truth, and with a perfect heart. This is testified of him in the history of the Kings, that he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that *David* his father did. For whereas *Jehashaphat*, and other Kings before him, who bore a good character in matters of Religion, yet suffered their people to do those acts of worship in high-places, which should have been performed at *Jerusalem*, *Hezekiah* removed those high-places, broke the images, cut down the groves, and abolished the brazen Serpent which *Moses* had made, because the people burnt incense to it.

*Secondly*, WHEREAS other Kings had been too apt to consult their ease and carnal interests in the practice of Religion, *Hezekiah* had a true and thorough Zeal for the glory of God in all that he did. He found the divine Worship almost lost in a heap of errors and idolatries; with which mens minds were so possessed, that a sudden restoration of the truth seemed to be both difficult and dangerous. Yet *Hezekiah* did not postpone any thing, or excuse the present doing of it with that fashionable plea of waiting for a more favourable opportunity: But he laid the Law of *Moses* before him as the standard and measure of his reformation,

formation, and pursued it exactly, trusting God with the consequences of it, and not doubting but he would bless and protect him in the way of his duty.

THIS is the substance of *Hezekiah's* plea, which he urged to move God to spare that life which hitherto he had made a good use of. And he urged it with importunate cries and tears, which prevailed with God to hear him and grant his request.

FOR *Isaiab*, who had brought him tidings of his death, was departed from him but a little way; before he was gone out into the middle court, says the Historian, the word of the Lord came to him, commanding him to go back again, and tell *Hezekiah*, *Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the King of Assyria: and I will defend this city. And this shall be a sign unto thee from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing which he hath spoken. Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun-dial of Abaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down.* In the History of the Kings this is related a little otherwise. There the Lord promises to heal *Hezekiah* so speedily, that in three days time he should be able to go up to the Temple. The King desires that some token might be given him, to certify him that it should be so. The Prophet offers him his choice of a token. *Shall the shadow of the dial, says he, go forward or backward ten degrees?* *Hezekiah* answered, *It is a small thing for it to go forward, let it rather return backward ten degrees.* This token was to be a miracle shown upon a sun-dial, and I think the wonder would have been much the same, whether the shadow had gone forward or backward, because I suppose  
either

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either way it would have been done in a moment. If this sudden movement was made in a dial which stood abroad, and went by the sun, it must be effected by a quick change of the sun's place in the Firmament, and then it must be a miracle all over the world. But if upon a dial-plate, such as we now have in our houses, the hand went back ten degrees, or hours, this might be done without any alteration of the sun's course, and then the miracle was only to *Hezekiah* and his family. And a miracle it would have been, to have seen this contrary motion at the bare word of the Prophet, without the hand or art of man to cause it: And it would have been as significant to the sick King, to teach him that the same Power which wrought this, could as easily set his life back, and prolong the number of his days upon Earth.

BUT Commentators observe, that all the ancient Doctors, both *Jews* and *Christians*, took the words of *Isaiah* to signify, that the Sun and all the heavenly Bodies went back upon this occasion. They would rather have said, that the change was made by a counter-turn of the Earth, if they had been acquainted with the present most rational systeme of Astronomy, without any alteration in the courses of the heavenly bodies. Tho' to these bodies the holy Scriptures ascribe the motions which make day and night, summer and winter. But this is done in compliance with the common apprehensions of mankind, and their way of speaking all the World over, and lays no prohibition upon learned men to conceive otherwise of them; since which way soever the motions are effected, the heavenly Appearances to us are still the same.

SOME think this lengthening of the day was recorded by the wise men of *Babylon* and *Egypt*, who were certainly curious in making astronomical



cal observations. We find indeed, *2 Chron. xxxii.* 31. that the King of *Babylon* sent Ambassadors to *Hezekiah* to congratulate him upon his recovery; and to enquire into the circumstances of the miracle which was wrought for him. But from this enquiry we cannot conclude whether the miracle were of a publick or a private nature: For they might be informed of it by report, without seeing it. But that which we read in *Herodotus* his History, looks more like a publick Record of this kind, *B. ii. c. 142.* where he writes, how the *Egyptian* Priests affirmed to him, that their ancestors had observed the Sun to have risen twice in the *West*, and to have set as often in the *East*. Which observations might be taken from the two extraordinary days we read of in Scripture, that in the time of *Joshua*, and this in the life of *Hezekiah*.

BUT I proceed to a speculation of a more theological nature, which is, to consider how what is said here, may be reconciled with the veracity and unchangeable decrees of God. For first here is a message brought to *Hezekiah* by the Prophet, that he must not expect to recover of his sickness, but prepare for death: And immediately the same Prophet pronounces a contrary sentence, that he should recover and live fifteen years longer: Which looks like a great change in the divine Will.

FOR the solving of this difficulty, several things may be said.

As First, That God's promises and threatnings are conditional; but are often expressed positively, and the condition on which they depend is to be supplied and understood by us. Tho' the Prophets themselves have sometimes failed in the understanding of it: Which was plainly the case of *Jonah*: For his message being given him in positive

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five terms, that *Niniveh* should be overthrown in forty days, he did not make the exception in his own mind, *unless they repented*, and so thought himself much disgraced that his prediction was not fulfilled: Whereas it was God's intention from the first to spare them, upon condition that they took warning in time and repented. And indeed this was the reason why he set them a time; for had he been fully resolved upon their destruction, he might as well have executed it without giving them any warning; but this was what the Prophet did not consider.

Secondly, It is likely that God revealed to *Isaiah*, that *Hezekiah's* distemper was of a mortal sort, and that in nature there was no possibility of his recovery; and so the Prophet was to tell him. But notwithstanding this, the King rightly believed that God was able, by his all-sufficient Power, to repair the breaches and defects of nature; for which purpose he made his earnest supplication to him. Such a power of the Deity has ever been acknowledged by all considerate people, who never imagined that there was such a fatality in sickness, or in death, but that God could grant life whenever he saw fit. Thus *Jairus* in the Gospel addresses to Christ, *Matth. ix. My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.* In like manner the sisters of *Lazarus* acknowledge, *John xi. Lord, if thou hadst been here, our brother had not died.*

THIS, I think, concludes strongly enough, that there is no such period set to every man's life, nor such sort of death appointed from his birth, as some have imagined. But that God gives us (to many of us at least) a longer or shorter continuance in this world, according as we behave ourselves in it; for so he has often declared in his word, and so our own experience teaches us in

abundance of instances. 'Tis true, many of the reasons of life and death pass man's understanding, and are known only to God; but yet there are many others which we cannot avoid seeing very plainly. Who can deny that multitudes destroy themselves by their own mis-conduct, by their immoderate lusts and passions, any one of which often cuts the thread of life? And others on the contrary live long and well, who would have died much sooner, had not they governed themselves by the rules of piety and virtue.

PIETY must evermore crown our virtue, if we desire to be shrowded under the wings of God's protection from the dangers and misfortunes which surround us in this mortal state. I know the enemies of Religion would fain perswade the world, that virtue is of it self a sufficient security to mankind. And this they glory in, that many of their impious tribe are men of virtue. But whatever they may seem to themselves, or to the world, they cannot be really and intrinsically virtuous. For Sin and *Satan* will be predominant, wherever the Spirit of God, which these men do not pretend to, is wanting. And we may as well expect that a bad soil should, without any care and cultivation, produce good fruit, as that the heart of man should naturally, and without the influence of divine grace, abound with virtuous affections.

HOWEVER, let these men enjoy all the health and long-life which temperance can afford, of which they are the reward, and may be had by these men, since they are to have none other hereafter; yet can temperance heal every disease of body and mind? or can it defend us from those evil accidents which are without us, and in the power of other agents to inflict? But it is clear even to a demonstration, that our prayers to God  
often



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often procure for us, either a total exemption from many calamities, or else a happy issue out of them. Of the truth of which there cannot be a better proof than the account of *Hezekiah's* recovery here before us.

FOR first *he was sick unto death*, says my Text, and had the sentence of death actually passed upon him by his Prophet, who was the Messenger of God, and acted in his name. And yet his earnest prayers and tears prevailed with God to rescue him from this imminent death, and prolong his life with an addition of fifteen years, and crown them with peace and prosperity.

THAT all this mercy and loving-kindness was vouchsafed to *Hezekiah* as a return of his prayers, is apparent from the answer of God by the Prophet, in these words: *Go tell Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father: I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years, &c.* Upon the whole it is certain, that this sickness had put an end to *Hezekiah's* life, if he had not earnestly prayed to God to spare him; and that God was moved by his prayers to reverse the sentence of death which was gone out against him, and to grant him a longer continuance upon the throne of his Kingdom.

WHAT now shall we say to those men who would perswade us, that all things come to pass in the world by a fatal necessity, and that a man's piety hath no influence upon the affairs of his life? Why we can confute them effectually from the History of the life of *Hezekiah*, who by his prayers obtained two miraculous deliverances; the first from the army of *Affyrians*, the second from a deadly fit of sickness. In both which cases matters were so transacted between God and the King by the ministry of the Prophet, as to leave no room for a cavilling Atheist to impute these deliverances

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to the wit of man, lucky chance, or turn of fortune; but he must be dumb, or confess that they were wrought by the supernatural power and hand of God stretched out from Heaven, as it is here represented.

THIS is written for our admonition, to excite us to be very diligent and devout in the worship of God, since the issues of life and death, and of all human affairs, are not only in his hands, but very much at the disposal of our prayers. The voice even of natural Religion proclaims, that *in God we live and move and have our being*; but the Oracles of our holy Scriptures assure us, that God is our most merciful and gracious Father, that he is nigh unto all them that call upon him, that he hears their prayers, and will deny them no manner of thing that is good for them.

IF the revelation which God hath given us of himself, had taught us to conceive of him no otherwise than as an austere and inexorable Lord and Master, who had settled all things in such an order, that they must issue from one another by a necessary chain of consequences, and that all our prayers, services, and endeavours could render them neither better nor worse, then indeed we should have reason to leave them out of our prayers, and have no concern about them. But our sacred Teachers have given us a more amiable and gracious Image of our God, and placed us in a nearer relation to him, even in that of dear children to a tender parent, who pursues no will of his own separate from our real interests, but in his government of this world accommodates himself to our circumstances, giving us the good things of this life, so far as he sees they will be profitable to us. But upon this condition, that we render him the duty and obedience of children, that we make a good use of his gifts, and glorify him for them,  
and

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and acknowledge him to be the fountain and donor of them.

WITH these dispositions we have not only a licence, but a command to ask every thing that is requisite both for our souls and bodies. Our Lord, who admonishes us not to overcharge our hearts with the cares of this life, has instructed us at the same time to make our daily prayers for all things that are needful, and to implore God's protection against the evil both of sin and of suffering.

AND he says abundance of things to convince us, that the reason why we labour under the want of many comforts is, because we want that faith and zeal and fervency in prayer, which is proper for the obtaining of them at the hands of God.

I conclude therefore, that no man knows what he loses, when by any suggestion of wicked men or Devils, he is drawn away so, as to neglect the worship of God. By such neglect he cuts himself off from the fountain of life and happiness, he throws himself out of the Almighty's Protection, he exposes himself to all manner of dangers and mischiefs ghostly and bodily. I am very sure, that the reason why mankind groan under such a load of calamities is, their ingratitude and rebellion against the God and Father of all mercies; whom if we would but agree to worship with that reasonable service which he requires of us, if we would but turn our blasphemies into prayers, and our atheistical debates into praises and adorations, we should quickly and light springing up in our darkness, mirth instead of mourning, the scourge of diseases and pains would be removed far from us, and we should rejoice in the love and peace and salvation of God.

WHEN, O when shall it once be, that we will awake out of our delusions, and lay hold of the real benefits which are offered us? When will we



leave our broken cisterns, and return to the fountain of living waters? When will we turn away our ears from those pernicious temptations which seduce us to the infernal pit, and hearken to the voice of Wisdom which leads us to the Kingdom of our gracious Lord?

LET us look back with regret upon those precious days and years wherein we have wandered from the right way, and now at last resolve to keep to it, and persevere in it stedfastly to the end of our race, that we may find that door of mercy which shall admit us into our Father's house, to the inheritance of the blessings there purchased and prepared for us by his Son *Jesus Christ* our Lord, to whom &c.



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# SERMON LVIII.

*On the Second Sunday after CHRIST-*  
**MAS-DAY.**



**ISAIAH xliii. 1, 2.**

*But now, thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the Rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.*



**T**HE Vision of *Isaiah*, 'tis well known, contains a representation of the present and future state of *Israel* and *Judah*. Their state in his time was very corrupt with respect to religion and virtue; on which account he denounces God's Judgments which were ready to fall upon them  
for

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for their sins, and should be inflicted by the *Affyrians, Babylonians*, and other hostile nations round about them. And because some of his expressions might be interpreted as if all the Twelve Tribes should be utterly cast away, therefore he frequently intersperses such consolations as this in the words of my Text, to assure the people, that if they were duly corrected and reformed by their Captivity, God would bring them out of it, and raise them up again to be his Church and People.

To confirm them in the belief of such a restoration, he puts them in mind of several arguments and reasons to expect it, which are briefly intimated in the words here before us.

*First*, He tells them, that upon their repentance God had promised them such a restoration. He promises it often, by this very Prophet, which was ground enough for them to depend upon it, if they had not been otherwise assured of it. But indeed their most ancient Oracles had foretold this. When *Moses* had threatened them with various Judgments, and particularly that they should be made captives and scattered among the Heathen in case they broke the Law and Covenant of their God; *Deut. xxviii, xxix.* he proceeds to assure them, that if in such circumstances they would return to the Lord, and obey his voice with all their heart and soul; that then he would turn their captivity, and gather them out of all nations where he had scattered them.

LIKEWISE the *Psalmist* recognizing the Divine promises to the House of *David*, *Psal. lxxxix.* introduces God speaking thus: 'If his children forsake my Law, and walk not in my Judgments; if they break my Statutes and keep not my Commandments: then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. But yet my loving-kindness I will not



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‘not utterly take from him, nor suffer my truth to fail. I have sworn by my holiness, and I will make it good to *David*, that his Seed shall endure for ever, and his Throne shall be as the Sun before me.’ This is a very clear and peremptory promise: how it hath been performed, must be a hard question for the *Jews* to answer; but we who believe *Jesus* the Son of *David* to be the *Messiah*, can easily prove the accomplishment of it.

Secondly, *ISAIAH* calls upon the people to consider, that this promise of Salvation is made to them by that God who created *Jacob* and formed *Israel*: This indeed is a common topick of consolation to every pious man, that he who created him, will have mercy on him, and is able, in all circumstances, to make good his promises, and preserve the work of his own hands.

BUT it was very proper for this people above all others to make such inferences, because they had been in a peculiar manner created and formed of God. For their Ancestors *Isaac* and *Jacob* were born of women that were for a great while barren, and were sent into the World on purpose to fulfil a Prophecy which had been revealed before they had any being, that in their Seed all the Families of the Earth should be blessed. Now this promise having not received its accomplishment in the days of *Isaiah*, it was very fit that he who was often warning them of their approaching captivity, should likewise assure them of their restoration from it, since God’s great end of creating them and forming them into a nation, could not be answered but by such a restoration. They were sprung from a root which, according to the course of nature, was incapable of producing them, and consequently were of miraculous birth and extraction: they were gathered into a Church and People that was to retain the knowledge of the true

true God so long, 'till the Gentiles were enlightened with it. This was not yet done: therefore they might hope to continue a Church and People 'till it was effected.

*Thirdly*, THEY might conclude this from former redemptions which God had wrought for them. *Fear not*, says he here by *Isaiah*, for *I have redeemed thee*. He redeemed *Abraham* from the idolatry of his native Country and Father's house; he redeemed *Isaac* from death, when he was bound upon the Altar, and the knife was lifted up in order to sacrifice him. He redeemed *Jacob* from the fury of his brother *Esau*, when he had resolved to kill him. He redeemed the first-born of this people in *Egypt*, when he slew those of the *Egyptians*; and disappointed *Pharaoh's* destructive Edict, when he commanded all their males to be drowned. And finally, he redeemed them from these Task-masters, and from the *Amalekites*, *Canaanites*, *Philistines*, and other enemies which, humanly speaking, were too strong for them, and would have swallowed them up, if God had not manifestly interposed, and made bare his arm in their defence. By the experience of such redemptions they might well conclude, that, if they reformed the corruptions of their religion and morals, for which God visited them, he would ransom them from their approaching Captivity.

*Fourthly*, A fourth ground of *Israel's* hope for God's future mercies, were the gracious appellations which he had bestowed upon them. *I have*, says he, *called thee by thy name; thou art mine*. He had changed their Father *Jacob's* name to *Israel*. He had named them, *his holy nation, his peculiar people*. For this he commands *Moses* to assure them from him, *Exod. xix. 5, 6. If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my Covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: ye shall be my*

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my Kingdom of priests and my holy nation. Thus to Israel in Egypt he sends messages by the style of the God of their Fathers, *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*: and demands their release of *Pharaoh*, saying, *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go.* In general he calls *Israel* his elect, and his first-born, intimating that he had a greater portion of love and blessings for them than for other people. It is averred by *Moses* and *David*, that God had owned them and preferred them before all others by the choicest and most illustrious of his mercies. Accordingly we find that our Lord employed his own personal ministry for reducing the lost sheep of the house of *Israel*. And *St. Paul* argues, *Rom. xi.* from their prerogative in the divine favour, that God had not utterly cast them off. His endearing appellations are thus proved to be a good ground for his people's hope and trust in him.

*Fifthly*, A farther argument to *Israel* to trust in God, were the Deliverances which he had vouchsafed some of them from the most merciless and devouring Elements of fire and water. *When thou goest*, says he, *or hast gone*, as the original imports, *thro' the waters, they have not overflowed thee; and thro' the fire, it hath not kindled upon thee.* The waters of the universal Deluge did not overflow their Ancestor *Sem*, whom God saved in the Ark with *Noah* his Father. The waters of the Red Sea did not overflow this people, when they fled thro' it on foot from the face of the *Egyptian* army: for God divided them by a mighty wind, and made them stand as firm as a wall on each hand of them. The waters of *Jordan* in like manner, and by the same Almighty Power, were parted asunder before this people, and left a dry ford for them to go over.

FROM



FROM the violence of Fire was *Abraham* delivered, according to an ancient Tradition of the *Jews*, who say, that when he refused to worship the Idols of the *Chaldeans*, they threw him into the fire, which was one of their Deities; but that God so restrained the power of it, that it did not hurt him. There is something in Canonical Scripture which favours this Tradition. For whereas it is said that *Abraham* came out of *Ur* of the *Chaldees*; this word *Ur* signifying both the name of a City, and *Fire*, several Interpreters have taken it in this latter sense; and *St. Jerom*, tho' he rejected it at first, yet afterwards he was pleased with it.

THIS being an ancient opinion, it is not improbable but that *St. Paul* might have an eye to it, *Heb. xi.* when he reckons amongst God's renowned servants some who by virtue of their faith had quenched the violence of fire. We know that the same Idolaters who persecuted *Abraham*, I mean the *Chaldeans*, cast three worthy men of his posterity into the fire, for refusing to worship their Idols; out of which the God of *Abraham* safely delivered them. Several more such deliverances might possibly be known to the Prophets, tho' their Histories are now lost to us: and to them *Isaiab* might allude in the words of my Text; tho' by his prophetic Spirit he might foresee the fiery tryal of the three men last mentioned, and fortifie their courage with this gracious promise of God, that when they walked thro' the fire, they should not be burnt, neither should the flame kindle upon them.

AND thus we have seen how the words of my Text were applicable to the people of *Israel* and *Judah* in the circumstances they were in, when *Isaiab* lived amongst them, and addressed himself to them.

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BUT in the farther application of them we must go by that general rule which St. Paul lays down for such occasions, *Rom. xv. 4.* That whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we thro' patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

THE words we are treating upon, are certainly a common Topick of consolation to all the faithful Servants of that God who first dictated and inspired them. So that to find our own blessing in them, and to understand them as the voice of our own merciful Father, we have nothing else to do, but to approve ourselves his obedient children; for he is no respecter of persons, nor confined to any one nation or people, but equally good and gracious to all those who equally love and fear him.

First then, As God promised his people a restoration from their captivity, upon their true repentance and return to their duty; so will he rescue us all from the slavery of sin and Satan, if we do in good earnest feel the oppression and misery of it, and would much rather be employed in doing God's will, and keeping his Commandments. This disposition the Jews manifested in their Captivity at *Babylon*: they were deeply humbled for their former transgressions of God's Law, and the affronts they had offered him by worshipping of Idols. They now detested all such lying vanities, tho' adored in the city where they sojourned, and kept constantly to their hours of prayer, with their faces turned to *Jerusalem*, and poured forth ardent petitions to be restored to that place where they might serve the God of their Fathers according to his own holy Covenant. I do not say they were all thus penitently and piously affected; but that many were so, appears from the Books of *Ezra*, *Nehemiah*, *Daniel*, and many of the *Psalms* composed

posed upon that occasion. And doubtless the holy Spirit of God had a regard to this happy change of their minds and manners, when he dictated the words of my Text. For he assures us by this same Prophet, that *there is no peace to the wicked*. So long as men continue in their sins, they are at enmity with God, excluded from the benefit of his promises, and liable to all his threatenings and judgments.

*Secondly*, Was it an argument to *Israel* to trust in God, because he had created them and formed them in so special a manner as is before represented? The like consideration is equally comfortable to every member of the Church of Christ. For in him we are regenerate and born again, we are become new creatures. We who before lay under the sentence of eternal death, are by his Spirit raised up again and quickned to immortal life. We that were under the tyranny of the Prince of Darkness and his reprobate Legions, are hereby rescued into the glorious light and liberty of the children of God.

THE Spirit of God speaking by the Prophets, styles the Kingdom of Christ *a new heaven and new earth*. And tho' the completion of such prophecies must not be expected till the end of this world, yet the beginnings and foundations of such a happy state are certainly laid here. I have often wished that we could fix in our minds just ideas of the different states of mankind, under the errors of Paganism, and the Religion we now profess. We should then be convinced, that as bad as the world is, it is much better than when dumb Idols were the Deities of it. Whether we consider the external face of things, or the inward affections and dispositions of men, we should see that the Christian world is much more commodiously inhabited, and the inhabitants better disposed



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posed to all social offices of humanity and charity now, than when it was enveloped in the darkness of Heathenism. And if the world be much the better for Christianity, notwithstanding the very partial and imperfect practice of it, to what degrees of happiness might it be improved, did we all observe the Gospel of our Lord according to the true intent and excellency of it? Then should we joyfully praise God that he hath created us anew, and formed us into the spiritual vineyard of his Church, which is productive of the best fruits.

*Thirdly*, ALL the redemptions which God vouchsafed to *Israel*, are proofs to us of his infinite power and goodness, and figures of greater things which he will do for us. For he first commanded *Abraham* to sacrifice his son, and then redeemed him by substituting another sacrifice in his stead; hereby presignifying that he would give his own Son to die for us, and make an atonement and propitiation for our sins. He led the children of *Israel* thro' the *Red-sea*, figuring thereby his holy Baptism, and teaching us that we must be born of Water and of the Spirit, before we can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

THE great struggle they had with difficulties in the Wilderness, and with various Enemies, before they were possessed of the promised Land, is a proper type and resemblance to us of the opposition we must expect from the enemies of our Religion, our Virtue, and our spiritual Welfare, and that we must thro' much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God.

THE Power and Goodness of God was magnified in carrying this people thro' the sea, preparing a table for them in the Wilderness, fighting their battles, and raising them again when they had lost themselves: And their infidelity and

ingratitude was betrayed in their murmurings and repinings, their revolts to idolatry, their hardness of heart, and incorrigibleness under chastisements. *Now all these things, says St. Paul, 1 Cor. x. happened unto them for ensamples, and are written for our admonition, to the end that we should not lust after evil things, as they lusted. Nor tempt Christ, as some of them tempted him, and were destroyed of serpents. If we dishonour him by our blasphemies, we forfeit our title to the benefit of his redemption: And then nothing remains for us, but to fall a prey to that old Serpent, who brought sin and death into the world, from which Christ alone is able to deliver us.*

*Fourthly, If God's gracious appellations of Israel assured them of his special regard for them, no less ground of rejoicing have we in the like assurances of his favour towards us. For the Scripture testifies that God hath called us in Christ to be his adopted children, to be fellow-heirs with Christ of his heavenly Kingdom. Our Lord himself hath several sayings which amount to as much as this. Fear not, my friends, them that can kill the body. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. And in the terms of the nearest affection and endearment he declares, that every one who doth the will of his heavenly Father, is his brother, and sister, and mother. And a little before his Ascension, he sends this gracious message to his Disciples, I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*

IN consequence of these declarations of our Lord, Believers are dignified in the Apostolick Writings with most honourable titles; as, *the saints, the beloved, the elect of God. Ye are, says St. Peter, 1 Pet. ii. 9. a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.* BUT

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BUT it was not without a special providence of God, that in a short time all the world, both friends and enemies, agreed to call the servants of Christ by a name derived from his own, *Christians*. Which as it is a title of the highest dignity on account of its root and derivation, so is it most proper to put us continually in mind of the love, fidelity, and duties we owe to Christ our head. For with a small variation of St. *John's* words, 1 *John* iii. we may triumphantly say, 'Behold what glorious marks of divine love are bestowed on us, that we should be called the Sons of God, and Brethren of Christ!' Our relation to him should make us consider our selves as ennobled far above any dignity which the world can impart to us, and consequently should animate us with a zeal to acquit our selves in all things as becomes men who are called by so worthy a name, and to be very circumspect that we do not give the profane world any occasion, by word or deed, to blaspheme that holy Name by which we are dignified. In which if we are careful, we shall maintain our own honour and comfort in it, and may with pleasure conceive God speaking to us in the words of my Text, *I have called thee by the name which thou bearest; thou art mine.*

Lastly, IN cases of extreme danger, particularly in perils of fire and water, God has shown himself the same in the Christian, as he was of old in the *Jewish* Church, a sufficient helper to deliver out of such troubles. Thus our Lord delivered St. *Peter*, when he walked on the water going to meet him. Thus he saved one *Victor* an aged Roman, who happening to be all alone in a ship that had neither rudder nor any victuals in it, was suddenly driven from the port of *Sardinia* to sea by a storm, and there tossed for some weeks together, till at last he was brought safe to the coast



of *Lucania* in *Italy*, and there landed. Whereupon he declared that he owed his deliverance to the visible appearance and assistance of Christ and his Angels; as *Paulinus* Bishop of *Nola* in *Campania*, a grave writer of the fourth Century, relates this event. Likewise in the monuments of the martyrdom of St. *Polycarp* Bishop of *Smyrna*, we are told, that when fire was put to the wood which was to burn the holy Man, it presently raised a great flame, which cast it self into the figure of an arch or half-circle, like the sail of a ship swelled with wind, and bore away on every side from *Polycarp's* body; so that his executioners not being able to burn him, were forced to dispatch him with a sword.

BUT to conclude; we need not multiply histories of this kind: They are only intended to demonstrate to us God's all-sufficiency, that he is able to deliver us from all dangers ghostly and bodily: And more particularly to convince us of his power and good pleasure to save us with a much greater salvation than any of these: That we may put our full trust and confidence in his gracious promises, that he will deliver our souls from being overwhelmed with those storms and tempests which the World or the Devil raise against us; and preserve both soul and body from the everlasting burnings of the world to come. Which deliverances he vouchsafes to all those who serve him according to the Gospel of his blessed Son. To whom with

Ec.

**F I N I S.**



A P P E N D I X  
O F  
S I X S E R M O N S

Upon Morning LESSONS,

Added to compleat the Course of the two  
first Volumes.









# S E R M O N

On CHRISTMAS-DAY.



ISAIAH ix. 6.

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*

**T**HE reason why these words are appointed to be read at this time is, because we understand them to be a description of the *Messiah*; and we have learned so to understand them from the ancient *Jewish* Commentators, tho' their modern writers will needs apply them to *Hezekiah*, against all the rules of grammar and common sense, and for no imaginable reason, but to deprive us Christians of an eminent proof of the truth of our Religion.

A little before, chap. vii. the Prophet had told *Abaz*, *Hezekiah's* Father, that a virgin of his family should conceive and bear a son, and should call

his name *Immanuel*, which being interpreted is, *God with us*. Now here in my Text he says, *Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given*. It is not doubted but that he means the same child in both places; and by these last words one would think he was then actually born; which would be many hundreds of years too soon for our purpose. But because no man ever came into the world, to whom the character in my Text could belong, except *Jesus Christ* alone; therefore we must say, and we say nothing that is strained or uncommon in the Prophets, that *Isaiah* speaks agreeably to his Vision; and seeing in his spiritual Vision that such a child would be born, he speaks of his birth as if it were already fulfilled, intimating hereby that it was as certain, as any thing that was then done and past. This is a common style with the Prophets, to speak of things to come, as if they had been actually accomplished in their own days, because they knew that by the decree of God the accomplishment of them was sure and infallible.

WE will proceed therefore to examine the characters and epithets here given of this child, and show that they all agree very exactly to the account which the Gospels give of our blessed Lord.

I. THIS child is here styled *wonderful*: And who so wonderful as our Lord and Saviour, in his birth, which was foretold by an Angel, accomplished by a pure Virgin, proclaimed by the heavenly Powers to the Shepherds and wise Men of the *East*? Who so wonderful in his preservation from the fate of the children massacred by *Herod*, and from divers attempts made afterwards upon his life by the envious *Jews*? Who so wonderful in the favour of God, who owned him for his son by audible voices from Heaven; and in mighty works

works which he daily wrought, healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, casting out Devils? Who so wonderful as he, who raised his own body from the grave, and ascended with it into Heaven in the presence of many spectators, and sent down his promised Spirit upon the Apostles, and endued them with power to work the same miracles as he had done?

THESE things do not seem so strange to many of us, because we are brought up from our infancy in the reading and hearing of them; which familiarity abates of their surprize. But if we would seriously consider them, and lay them together, and compare our Lord in these respects with all the Histories that ever came to our knowledge, we shall be fully convinced that he was the most wonderful person that was ever born into the world.

II. THIS child is styled *Counsellor*: And such was Christ to us in the most eminent manner. He came from the bosom of the Father to make all his will and pleasure known to mankind. And he assures us, *Matth. xi. 27.* that *no man knows the Father, but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son shall reveal him.* What can we say more of him, than those comprehensive words of the Gospel denote, wherein he is celebrated as the Light, the Truth, the Wisdom of God? There was a thick gloom and vail of ignorance upon the hearts of men, till the coming of Christ, as the Prophet intimates in this and the foregoing Chapters: But when this sun of righteousness arose upon the world, the people that walked in darkness saw his light, and they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them his light shined.

To speak more distinctly upon this head: Christ is our Counsellor upon a threefold account.

1. As he hath reformed and rectified our notions of the Deity, and turned us from the worship



ship of dumb idols, to serve the living and true God. We were of the number of those, who, to speak in the language of our Prophet, *sought unto familiar spirits and wizards*, applying to our implacable enemies for succour, and seeking our welfare of the authors of all our calamities and miseries. What a multitude of pretended, usurping Deities were then to be found in our Temples, and what a tedious train of rites and ceremonies did each of them require in the performance of their worship?

BUT now our heavenly Counsellor has rescued us from those many Lords which once had the dominion over us, and assured us, that all the Deity we are to worship, is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three Persons, but one God, who requires no sacrifice of us, comparable to that of a devout, holy, and upright heart. *For, says he, my Father seeketh those who will worship him in spirit and in truth.*

THE articles of our Faith are now summed up in a short Creed, short in words, but weighty in substance, and not to be known by any other method of knowledge, but only by the revelation of *Jesus Christ*.

2. CHRIST is our Counsellor as he hath taught us the Truths of the moral Law, and the real difference between good and evil. Concerning which how apt both *Jews* and *Gentiles* were to mistake, we may learn from his Sermon on the Mount. Which if we had never known, we might have thought that the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees there represented would have carried us to Heaven; but now we are sure that it will not. Now we know that the humble, the meek, the pure in heart, the persecuted for righteousness sake, are blessed; that it is much more for our advantage to suffer injuries than to do them; to feast the

the poor rather than the rich; to give and lend where nothing can be hoped for again, and to deny our sensual appetites, much better than to indulge them. Such are the counsels of our blessed Lord, which he has authorized and enforced with his own most perfect, holy, and upright example.

3. CHRIST is our Counsellor, as he hath instructed us in the Means whereby we may obtain everlasting Salvation. He hath set open his heavenly Kingdom for the reception of all those who believe in him, and he has revealed the way to it so fully and clearly, that the most simple and illiterate person, who brings an honest resolution to walk in it, cannot mistake it. 'He that believeth, and is baptized, he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, he that heareth my word and doth it, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.' This is his promise; and he hath informed us of the method how he will perform it, which is, not by continuing us always in the bodies we are now in, for this would be more properly eternal death than life; such flesh and blood as we now carry about us, cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: But after death has dissolved us and laid us in our graves, our Lord will raise us up again, in circumstances quite different from our present condition, and invest us with such glory as adorns his own person, and establish us for ever in his immortal Kingdom. This, I confess, is now true and common Doctrine; but it would not have been known to us, or at least not so known as to have had a due effect upon us and commanded our faith, if he had not revealed it to us. And therefore to him our Counsellor and Instructor it is owing, that we know and believe this.

Thirdly,

III. THE third character which is given to this child said here to be born, is, *the mighty God*. This corresponds with that which was said before, chap. vii. *They shall call his name Immanuel,* which being interpreted is, *God with us*. To the same purpose is that of *Jerem. xxiii.* *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice on the earth. And this is the name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.* And the same he repeats again, *xxxiii. 16.* There are many more predictions in the Law and the Prophets, that God should be incarnate and born into the world, which I will not now insist on, having mentioned them upon other occasions. The observation which I think proper to make upon them is this; that these Scriptures could not be fulfilled in any of the Kings of *Judah*, nor in any other person that was ever born into the world before the nativity which we now celebrate. There have been, I confess, some Kings of the *Gentiles*, such as *Alexander of Macedon*, and others before and after him, who were very fond of being thought to be descended from their Gods: But then they were such Gods as no good man would desire to be allied to; and these pretenders have demonstrated, both by their lives and deaths, that they were meer mortal, sinful creatures. It is left therefore to our blessed Lord alone, to be God as well as Man. This the Holy Ghost pre-signified, the Angels proclaimed, and the whole Church of Christ, i. e. many millions of people, have always believed.

THIS is the character of *Jesus Christ*, from the beginning to the end of the *New Testament*, that he is God as well as Man. He affirms it of himself in his disputes with the *Jews*; 'I am before  
' *Abra*



*Abraham*, I am *David's* Lord: I and my Father (meaning God) are one. And in his discourse with his Disciples, 'I came out from the Father, and am come into the World: Again I leave the World, and go to the Father.' And in his last prayer, *John* xvii. 'Glorifie me, O Father, with thine own self, even with the Glory which I had with thee before the World was.'

THIS is the doctrine which his Evangelists, Apostles, and Ministers constantly taught of him, That he was God from all Eternity: That by him all things were made in the beginning, and are still upheld by the word of his Power: That being in the form of God, and thinking it no robbery to be equal with God, he humbled himself, became man, and was born of the family of *David*, true and rightful King of the *Jews*. That this is he of whom *Moses* in the Law and the Prophets did write, the Christ of God.

THIS claim of our Lord, and these testimonies of his Apostles, were abundantly confirmed both by his own mighty works, and by the like works which they wrought in his name. So that he was most powerfully and undeniably manifested to be the Son of God.

IV. THE fourth part of this child's character is, that he should be called *the everlasting Father*, which at first sight seems impossible to be applied to our blessed Lord, who claims only to be the Son of God, the second Person in the Trinity: And in this sense indeed it is impossible for him to be the everlasting Father; but in this sense the word *Father* is not here to be understood. Our *English* translation of this place is something improper and unintelligible: The LXX and other Interpreters render it, *Father of the age or world to come*, which is very agreeable to the original, and makes this plain sense, that the child here spoken of,

of, should be the Father, *i. e.* the Author of Founder of an everlasting Kingdom. This now is so proper and peculiar to our Lord, that it can belong to none other. For he has erected a spiritual Kingdom in the World, which has lasted near seventeen hundred years, and shall continue, as he hath assured us, to the day of Judgment; and then it shall be consummate and completed in the Kingdom of Heaven. Of this Kingdom *Isaiah* gives us an excellent description, chap. xi. and both he and other of the Prophets exhibit many pleasing views of it in their spiritual Visions. They style it a new Heaven and new Earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, and together with that, all manner of sincere and substantial felicity. The prophecies of this Kingdom are alluded to, and applied to the Christian Dispensation throughout the *New Testament*. The Angel *Gabriel*, in his Salutation of the blessed Virgin, assures her, that *of her Son's Kingdom there should be no end*. In the beginning of his Ministry he ordained his twelve Apostles to go and preach this Kingdom. At the end of it he declares, *all power is given unto me, in heaven and earth*. To this end, says *St. Paul*, *Rom. xiv.* *Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living*. And to him the same Apostle, *Heb. i.* applies those passages of *Psalms* *xlv.* *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom, &c.* Finally, *St. John* in his Revelation xi, heard great voices in Heaven, saying, *The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*

THUS we see how this fourth part of the character, the everlasting Father, tho' it be obscured by our translation, yet as it stands in the original, and as it is rendred by other Interpreters, is

applicable to our Lord, and to him only, that he is the Father or Founder of an everlasting Kingdom.

V. The last part of the child's character here spoken of, is, that he should be called, *the Prince of Peace*: This was an eminent title of the *Messiah*; and this blessing of his reign was much celebrated by the Prophets. In his time, says the Psalmist, shall the righteous flourish, yea and abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth. Mercy and truth shall meet together; righteousness and peace shall kiss each other. In Christ's reign, says *Isaiab*, chap. ii. people shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: Nation shall not lift up sword against Nation, neither shall they learn war any more. In his reign, says he, chap. xi. the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and kid, the calf and the lion, the cow and the bear, shall all herd and feed together, and a little child shall manage them: Intimating hereby, that people of all Nations and Tempers should unite and love one another in the Church of Christ. Much more might be cited from the Prophets to this purpose: But I hasten to the *New Testament*, to show there how the prophetick Characters of this King and Kingdom of Peace were fulfilled in our blessed Lord.

AND First, We learn from the *Roman* Historians, that at the time of our Lord's Nativity, the temple of *Janus* at *Rome* was shut up; in token of a profound peace all over the World: For the *Romans* being then Lords of the World, had power to make peace or war as they pleased. But there was a special providence of God in it, that his blessed Son, *the Prince of Peace*, should be brought into the World in such a season of tranquillity. Accordingly we hear the Angels proclaiming at his



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his Nativity, *Peace on earth, and good-will towards men.*

*Secondly,* WHEN he came to preach the Gospel, he began his Sermon with, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, blessed are the peace-makers: and, Bless those that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.' He calls upon his Disciples to learn of him to be meek and lowly in heart, that they might find rest for their souls. And when some of them would have called down fire from Heaven to have consumed a City of the Samaritans, because they refused them entertainment, he rebuked them, saying, *Ye know not what spirit ye are of; for the Son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.* Briefly, when he was apprehended and brought to his tryal, he practised his own doctrine of meekness and patience very exactly. And when St. Peter drew his sword in his defence, he commanded him to put it up again, *For, says he, all they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword.*

*Thirdly,* WHEN he took his leave of his Disciples, he bequeathed Peace to them, as the best legacy which he could leave them. *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.* At his various appearances among them after his Resurrection, he commonly saluted them with the blessing of peace: And it was his most solemn charge to them, that after his Ascension, they should distinguish themselves from the people of the World, by cultivating a strict unity, peace, and love one with another.

*Fourthly,* One great end of our Lord's coming into the World, was, to break down the partition walls between all Nations, and take away all party-distinctions from among men. He had been pro-



promised the *Heathen* for his inheritance, and the utmost parts of the Earth for his possession: And he made it his business to gather men from all parts into one fold, under one shepherd. So that, as St. Paul speaks, *in Christ Jesus there is neither Greek nor Jew, Circumcision nor Uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, Bond nor Free, but Christ is all, and in all.*

Fifthly, THE most signal act which entitles our Lord to the character of the Prince of Peace, is this, that he has reconciled us to God, and made an atonement for the sins of the whole world. *God was in Christ*, says St. Paul, *reconciling the World to himself*, forgiving our sins, blotting out the charge of disobedience and sentence of condemnation which stood against us; adopting us for the children of God, and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven. 'Who now shall lay any thing to the charge of God's Elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, or rather that is risen from the dead, who sitteth at the right Hand of God, to make continual intercession for us. Wherefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, thro' our Lord *Jesus Christ*.' So that in all the respects before mentioned, there is none that can, so properly as he, be styled, *The Prince of Peace*.

BUT it may be objected, that there are sayings in the *New Testament*, which seem contrary to some part of this character of our Lord. For at his presentation in the Temple, *Simeon* pronounced of him, that he was appointed for the rise and fall of many in *Israel*, and for a sign that should be spoken against, or an object of debate and contradiction. Our Lord himself says, that he came *not to send peace upon earth, but a sword.*

And after his departure, the preaching of his Ministers occasioned great tumults in many Cities, and got them the name of the men that turned the World upside down. All this is very true, and yet no hindrance but that our Lord may justly be styled the Prince of Peace. He offered it to a World that was at war with God, and could not easily be reconciled. Of which he had reason to complain in the words of his Ancestor King *David, I labour for peace, but when I speak unto them thereof, they make them ready to battle.* He came to reform the Religion of the World, which he could not do, without destroying the works of the Devil in it: Nor could this be done without demolishing Idols, and changing the corrupt fashions and manners of men, which it was the interest of some and the pleasure of others to maintain very strenuously. This created, as it always will, great opposition to the work of the Gospel. And this is the true and only reason of the fore-mentioned Texts, which seem contrary to the peaceable Spirit of Christ.

AND thus, upon a thorough disquisition of all the parts of this character in my Text, we find that it suits exactly well with the Evangelical History of our Lord, and fits him incomparably better than it can do any other person.

To conclude then: Let us resolve to believe his wonderful Nativity, Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension; let us hear the voice and follow the directions of this excellent Counsellor; let us embrace the Adoption which is offered us through this Son of God, and honour him even as we honour the Father: And let us strive to make our Calling and Election sure in him, who is the Founder and Author  
of

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of everlasting Salvation to us; that finally we may live with him who is the Prince of Peace, who shall put all enemies under our feet, and exalt us far above them all, even to that eternal and happy Kingdom where he reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God world without end.







# S E R M O N

*On the First Sunday after CHRISTMAS-DAY.*



ISAIAH xxxvii. 31, 32.

*And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah, shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall do this.*



OW this history comes to be read at this season, after it had been read once before, out of the Second Book of Kings, on the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, is a matter which deserves consideration. I doubt not but the Compilers of our Liturgy had their reasons for this appointment. But because I have not yet met with any Book which discovers them, I will endeavour to assign such as I think are most probable, and carry the best appearance of weight with them.

First then; *ISAIAH* being a Prophet, who of all others is most copious in his visions and revelations

tions of the coming of Christ, it was fit that such a portion of his Book should be read at this season, as might incontestably and to the meanest capacity demonstrate, that he was endued with the true Spirit of Prophecy. And such demonstration is fully given us in the matter of fact here laid before us. For when the *Assyrians* had overspread the land of *Israel* and *Judab* with an impetuous tide of victory, and were just ready to invest *Jerusalem* with a formidable army, while *Hezekiah* and his people saw nothing so certain before their eyes as immediate destruction, the Prophet *Isaiah*, full of the Spirit of God, begins a song of triumph over haughty *Sennacherib*, telling him *that the daughter*, i. e. the city of *Sion*, *was hitherto a virgin*, had never been conquered, and so should remain in spite of all his forces.

IN the person of God, and in a God-like style, he thus mortifies his swelling pride. ‘ Do you know whom you have reproached and blasphemed; against whom you have exalted your looks, and discharged your loud menaces? I have heard your impious arrogance, how you glory in your hosts, that you have surmounted the highest obstacles, and drank up whole rivers with your multitudes. But you should have learned this lesson long ago, you might easily have learned it, that you were but my instrument and scourge to lay fenced cities in ruinous heaps. Who was it that enfeebled, dismayed, and confounded the inhabitants? Who made them as unable to withstand you, as the mown grass? It was I, the Holy One of *Israel*. And now, since you have defied me at my own city and temple, and filled my ears with your tumultuous blasphemy, I will presently make you sensible what you are in my hands: I will put my hook in your nose, and my bridle in your lips, and will

‘ turn you back by the way by which you came. ’  
 Then addressling himself to his own people, he  
 graciously promises to supply their food which  
 the Enemy had destroyed, in a miraculous way.  
 And bids them fear nothing, for the *Assyrian*  
 should not shoot so much as an arrow against their  
 city: ‘ For, says he, I will blast his army, the news  
 ‘ of which will send him into his own country,  
 ‘ and there he shall fall by the edge of the sword. ’

SUCH were the words of God by *Isaiah*, con-  
 cerning the fate of *Sennacherib*, and the deliver-  
 ance of *Jerusalem* from his invasion; and the ac-  
 complishment of them was so punctual, as plainly  
 proved that they were indeed the words of God.  
 The issue was so glorious and joyful to *Hezekiah*  
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 he was come into the World, resolved to send him  
 quickly out of it again; and for that purpose or-  
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 rect them to the particular house where they  
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 patch



patch our Lord among the rest. And how was he delivered? why just as *Hezekiah* was rescued from the sword of *Sennacherib*, by the ministry of a good Angel. For his heavenly Father sent his Angel to *Joseph* in a dream, saying, *Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and continue there till farther notice: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.* In like manner he warned the wise men of the East, who came to worship our Saviour, and spoke with *Herod* in their way to *Bethlehem*, and promised to bring him word where to find him: I say, God's Angel appeared to these men, and charged them not to speak with *Herod* any more about it, but to return into their own country another way.

AND as *Sennacherib*, though he escaped the sword of the destroying Angel, yet soon after was assassinated by his own children; so *Herod* survived his impious and bloody attempt against our Lord but a short time, probably not above two years; nor was he more fortunate than *Sennacherib*, in his own Family. For though his Sons did not shed his blood, yet they broke his heart, partly through their plottings against him, and partly through his jealousy and cruelty towards them. Indeed the Tragedies in this *Herod's* Family were so unnatural and dismal, that I never read nor heard of any like them. First, he drowned *Aristobulus* his wife's brother, and afterwards put to death *Hyrcaus* their Grandfather, being eighty years old. Next, he brought his Queen *Mariamne* to a formal trial and execution: and afterwards lamented the loss of her, even to distraction. For *Josephus* says that she excelled both in continence and courage, that she was an exquisite beauty, and of so agreeable a carriage as surpassed all those of her time. After her death, his rage brought many more of his own relations to the like untimely end; as *Alex-*

‘ turn you back by the way by which you came. ’  
 Then addressing himself to his own people, he graciously promises to supply their food which the Enemy had destroyed, in a miraculous way. And bids them fear nothing, for the *Assyrian* should not shoot so much as an arrow against their city: ‘ For, says he, I will blast his army, the news of which will send him into his own country, and there he shall fall by the edge of the sword. ’

SUCH were the words of God by *Isaiah*, concerning the fate of *Sennacherib*, and the deliverance of *Jerusalem* from his invasion; and the accomplishment of them was so punctual, as plainly proved that they were indeed the words of God. The issue was so glorious and joyful to *Hezekiah* and his people, and such an illustrious demonstration both of the power and goodness of God, and of his speaking by the Prophet *Isaiah*, that the sacred Pen-men thought fit to repeat it in their Writings, and for the same reasons it is worthily repeated in the service of our Church.

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*andra*, *Mariamne's* mother, his sister *Salome's* husband, his three sons, *Alexander* and *Aristobulus*, about a year, and *Antipater* five days before his own death. His own death concluded these Tragedies, which happened after this manner. He had a complication of diseases, violent burnings, ulcers in his bowels, convulsions in his nerves, swellings in his legs and feet, asthma in his lungs, rottenness in his joints, accompanied with direful itchings, swarms of worms, and intolerable smells: so that he was a mere hospital of incurable diseases, and all the while had an insatiable, voracious Stomach. Any one of these pains was enough to have put an end to mortal life; but *Herod* was continued for some time under them, for an example of the divine vengeance upon such a tyrant as he was in other respects, but more especially in his blaspheming of God, and his seeking to destroy the best of *David's* Sons, the best of the Kings of *Israel*.

Now may we take up *Isaiab's* words, and with a little variation of them, triumph over *Herod*, and say, 'The infant King of *Israel* hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou drawn thy sword, and lift up thy spear? even against the Holy one of *Israel*. But he hath put his hook in thy nose, and his bridle in thy lips, and hath brought thee down from the height of the mountains, from the sides of *Lebanon*, and turned thy sword upon thy own flesh, and made thee a terror to thy self. Hast thou not heard long ago what his heavenly Father had decreed, and of ancient times how he had promised to exalt his Son above the Kings of the earth? Behold now he hath brought it to pass, that thou shouldst be the first Trophy of his irresistible power, that by thy fate the  
' World

‘ World may know, that he will defend his Son  
‘ for his names sake, and for his elect and adop-  
‘ ted childrens sake.’

3dly, **H E R E** is comfort for the Church of God in the lowest circumstances and greatest extremity. *The remnant*, says he, *that is escaped of the house of Judah, shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.* God’s Heritage, by the invasion of *Sennacherib*, was driven up into a narrow compass within the walls of *Jerusalem*; and seemed like a handful of corn ready to be devoured by the fowls of the air: But these fowls were destroyed, and this handful was sown in the ground, and multiplied so as to spread over the face of the earth. *For out of Jerusalem went forth a remnant, and they that escaped but of mount Sion.* They escaped those swords which were pointed at their throats; they went forth of those walls wherein they were in a manner entombed, and accounted as dead corpses.

It is true, after three or four more Kings reigns, they went forth as far as *Babylon*, and lived there in a state of captivity; and this too was foretold by the Prophet *Isaiah*, which farther confirms the truth of his prophetick Spirit. ‘ God, says he to *Hezekiah*, will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the King of *Affyria*. But the days are coming that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to *Babylon*; and of thy Sons which shall descend from those which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be Eunuchs in the palace of the King of *Babylon*.’ But how numerous are his predictions concerning their return from thence? From thence he promises a remnant which should begin the Kingdom of the *Messiah* from mount *Sion*, and propagate his Worship from *Jerusalem*. So *Eusebius* understood these words of  
my

my Text, interpreting them of the twelve Apostles, by whom they were most eminently fulfilled. And so *Isaiab* declared before, Chap. xi. in most express and emphatical words. 'In that day, says he, there shall be a root of *Jesse*, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to him shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious. And the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people which shall be left, from *Assyria*, from *Egypt*, and from other countries. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the out-casts of *Israel*, and gather together the dispersed of *Judah* from the four corners of the earth.'

UPON sundry occasions, more especially in cases of great distress and danger, such as was that here before us, these Promises are made. And the seal and assurance of them is, the zeal of the Lord of Hosts, and the oath which he sware unto *David* his servant. The zeal, i. e. the high concern of God for his own glory, shall work out this redemption, which those who are to be redeemed neither deserve, nor are able to effect. We say, and the Holy Scriptures teach us to say it, that the Church of God shall never be rooted out of this World, because it is a school of discipline for a select number of people, whom he hath chosen and ordained to be numbered with his Saints in glory everlasting. Not that we may conclude from hence, as both *Jews* and *Christians* have been apt to do, that the true Church shall never be removed from any particular nation or people, who once were in possession of it: For the Scriptures of both Testaments affirm the contrary. 'I will break down the hedge and the wall of my unprofitable vineyard, says God by our Prophet, Chap. v. and lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall



‘ shall come up briars and thorns: I will also  
‘ command the clouds, that they rain no rain up-  
‘ on it. The Kingdom of God, says Christ to  
‘ the *Jews* of his time, shall be taken from you,  
‘ and be given to a nation which will bring forth  
‘ the fruits of it.’ And though of his Church  
universal he hath affirmed, that *the gates of Hell*  
*shall not prevail against it*: yet he threatned the  
particular Churches of *Asia*, to deprive them of  
the light of his Gospel for their unfruitfulness:  
as in fact we know he has done.

THE Church of God is compared to a vine,  
which has often been transplanted from one place  
to another, from *Chaldea*, from *Egypt*, from *Ca-  
naan*, into the islands of the *Gentiles*. And if we  
trace it, we shall find that it has been propagated  
by very slender shoots through ages and countries.  
First *Abraham*, by God’s appointment, was the  
founder of that religion which, for the substance  
of it, we profess at this day. And though he had  
a numerous posterity, yet how few of his chil-  
dren were heirs of that faith and piety of his,  
which deserved the name of true religion? Even  
of that branch which was the chosen seed, the  
greatest part revolted to idolatry. And such of  
them as were not idolaters, in the common sense  
of the word, yet often followed such ways as were  
quite contrary to the word and will of God.  
Our Saviour called those of his time, *an adulte-  
rous generation*: and when they gloried that *Abra-  
ham* was their Father, he denied their claim, tel-  
ling them, that if they were *Abraham’s* children,  
they would walk in his ways and do his works.  
By which it appears, that he founded the relation  
to *Abraham* more in a similitude of manners, than  
in a lineal descent and pedigree. And by the same  
rule he makes all the faithful servants of God re-  
lated to himself; saying, *Whosoever doth the will*  
of

*of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother.*

ACCORDING to which rule he would find but few related to him, even in his own Church, if he should now come down upon earth, and personally converse with us. For to pass over those, whose mouths are full of cursing and blasphemy, who deny the Lord that bought them, and desert from the standard under which they were baptized, into the tents of impiety; if he should separate those who call him Lord, from those who do his will, how small would be the number of Christians indeed, in comparison of those who are such in name? From whence we may learn,

1<sup>st</sup>, NOT to entertain mean thoughts of our Lord, because there are but few sincere Christians. What says our Prophet *Isaiah*? *Though the number of the children of Israel were as the sand upon the sea shore for multitude, yet a remnant, a few only of them, shall be saved.* And our Lord himself hath foretold us, that the way to his Kingdom is straight and narrow, and that few there be that find it. And that many at the day of judgment shall plead the spirit of Prophecy, preaching, and working miracles in his name, who notwithstanding shall be banished his society to all eternity. Likewise the Apostle *St. Paul*, writing to the *Corinthians*, says, *1 Cor. i. 26. Ye see your calling, Brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.* To the same purpose is that of *St. James*, *ii. 6, 7. Do not rich men oppress you? Do not they blaspheme that holy name by which you are called?* Now if any man will say, that these characters belong only to the first ages of Christianity, it were to be wished, that he could prove what he says, to be true. But experience, which is instead of a  
thousand

thousand arguments, is against him. For at this day, not many of the wise politicians of the World, not many rich, not many noble, render unto our Lord the honour due unto his name, nor worship him with an holy Worship. What then? shall we make the less account of our Christianity, because it has not a majority of votes on its side? No; but let it suffice us, that we can challenge all the great ones aforesaid, to match it, or to produce any thing comparable to it, for the glory of God and the benefit of mankind. And this they confess in their serious intervals, especially upon their death-beds. And they are no otherwise to be esteemed of, than myriads who have lived under any virtuous institution, and have not conformed to the rules of it. The fault is not to be laid upon the Institution it self, but upon the pride, sensuality and perverseness of those who having been educated in it, have never submitted to the laws and directions of it.

2dly, HENCE we should learn to value the true religion and the professors of it. It is an old observation, and certainly a true one, that 'God spares the bulk of mankind, and replenishes the earth with his Blessings, for the sake of that small family of children which he has amongst us, and in prospect of their farther encrease and improvement.' That the remainder of his Church might take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards, is the reason here given in my Text, why he delivered *Jerusalem* from the siege of the *Assyrians*. No doubt but the greater part of the citizens were such as deserved the wrath of God. I believe this is, and always has been, the state of all great cities in the World. And I think we may roundly conclude so of *Jerusalem*, from the character given



ven of it in the beginning of the Book of *Isaiah*. And for the demerits of such men, the *Assyrians* were sent to invade and distress them. But then there was still a seed of God, a remnant, a small number of truly pious and good people among them. In regard to whom, and that by them he might continue his Church, and extend it for the salvation of mankind, according to the promises which he had made to *Abraham* and to *David*, he delivered the whole city of *Jerusalem* from *Sennacherib*, that the remnant might go forth for the purposes aforesaid. And just so he dealt with the Ship's company which carried *St. Paul* from *Cæsarea* to *Rome*. When they were in danger of being cast away in a tempest, an Angel of God appeared to *Paul* in a vision by night, saying, *Fear not Paul, for thou must be brought before Cæsar; and loe, God hath given thee all that sail with thee.* The whole company got safe to *Rome*, for the sake of the Apostle, who was sent thither to preach the Gospel. This, I say, should make us sensible, what a safeguard true religion and the professors of it are to mankind.

3dly, HERE we may see God's zeal for his children, in working such marvellous deliverances for them, though they are so few in number. One hundred and eighty five thousand *Assyrians* were destroyed from Heaven, as they were preparing to besiege *Jerusalem*, when there was not perhaps a tenth part of that number of true *Israelites* within the city. However if they were much fewer, they were enough for a seed to preserve the Church of God among men; and that was his end in saving them. He has wrought miracles for small families, to save them, for the like reason. Thus he saved *Noah* by the Ark, and *Lot* by the hand of Angels, and the first Christians by a special Revelation to depart from *Jerusalem*,

*Jerusalem*, before it was destroyed by the *Romans*. I think I cannot close this remark with better words than those of *St. Peter* upon this occasion, *2 Pet. ii. 9. The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust to the day of Judgment, to be punished.* And therefore let us, in the

Last place, O W N our dependance upon God, and regard him as our only defence and salvation in time of trouble, seeking to him, as *Hezekiah* did here, by devout prayers and supplications, and craving the assistance of his Church and Ministry, as this King did of the Prophet *Isaiah*, to obtain of him an answer of peace and love. But let not the day of rebuke and trouble, be the only occasion of such addresses. Let us walk with God in our daily conversation, and maintain constant communion with him. Let us be sensible not only of our wants, but mercies, and abound in thanksgivings as well as prayers. Let us be true to our part of the Covenant of Grace, and as duly observe the honour, pleasure, and will of God, as we hope for the benefit of his favour and protection. This will stir up his zeal for us, to be very high unto us in all that we call upon him for. Of such seekers he will easily be found: to such worshippers he will shew himself a most gracious and bountiful Benefactor, through the merits and mediation of *Jesus Christ* our Lord; To whom, &c.





# S E R M O N

On the Second Sunday after CHRIST-  
MAS-DAY.



ISAIAH xli. i.

*Keep silence before me, O islands, and let  
the people renew their strength: let them  
come near, then let them speak: let us  
come near together in judgment.*



IT is observable, that the Prophecy of *Isaiah* abounds with great variety of religious instructions, serious admonitions, sharp reproofs, severe threatnings to obstinate sinners, and gracious promises to the penitent, humble servants of God. And as he plainly pronounces God's sentence upon *Israel*, that they should be carried into captivity for their sins; so by the same authority he assures them, that they should be restored to their own Country again; and that in process of time both *Jews* and *Gentiles* should be gathered into one Church and Kingdom under the reign of the *Messiah*, whose character and government he delights  
to



to set forth and dwell upon. These things he often repeats, that they might be sure to be understood and regarded, and he adorns them with all the beauties of an elegant style and moving rhetoric, as they well deserved.

IN order to facilitate the conversion of the *Gentiles*, he enters into a serious debate with them concerning the vanity of their own Idols, and the all-sufficient power, wisdom, and goodness of the God of *Israel*. That is the subject of this xli chapter here before us; which begins with the words of my Text, commanding all the World to be silent, that the following discourse might be heard distinctly and with a suitable attention. *Keep silence before me, O islands*, i. e. hearken all ye foreign Countries; for all nations which were parted from *Jewry* by the sea, were, in the idiom of their language, styled islands. *Let the people renew their strength*; let them muster up all the arguments and objections they can think of, against what I am going to say; *let them come near and speak*, and joyn issue with me in the cause which is now to be tried between us.

I. AND the first instance which he propounds of the power, wisdom, and goodness of the God of *Israel*, is, in the life and fortune of a righteous man whom he raised up and made famous in the east. Now because this man is not called here by any proper and peculiar name, therefore interpreters are divided about him, who he should be. Some will have him to be *Cyrus the Persian*, who restored *Israel* from *Babylon* to their own Country. But though he was the best of the *Persians*, yet I think he cannot be called *righteous*, if that word signifies, as I apprehend it always to mean in holy Scripture, one who is *right in his religion*, i. e. a worshipper of none but the true God, which the *Persians* were not at that time. Besides, several

of the following parts of this description cannot well be adjusted to *Cyrus*. Others therefore understand it of *Abraham*, and his seed according to the Promise in general, and more especially of the *Messiah*; to all whom how it may be adapted, let us now proceed to enquire.

To begin with *Abraham*. It is said of him, that God called him from his Country, from his kindred, from his father's house, into a strange land which he knew nothing of. That *Abraham* obeyed the divine Command, and went the way wherein God led him. That while he sojourned among various nations differing from him in religion, manners, and fashions, God was his shield and safe-guard, enriching him with money and servants, flocks and herds, and suffering no man to do him any considerable injury. Insomuch that when *Pharaoh* King of *Egypt*, and *Abimelech* King of *Gerar*, took his wife from him in order to marry her, as thinking she had been his sister, God reproved them for it in visions of the night, and hid his afflicting hand upon them, which he would not remove till they had restored her. And when four Kings invaded the place where *Lot* dwelt, and carried him away captive, *Abraham* armed his trained servants, being three hundred and eighteen, and pursued these spoilers, and rescued *Lot* from them, with all the spoils which they had taken.

AND how God promised to multiply the children of *Abraham* as the stars of Heaven for multitude, and that he would give them the land of *Canaan* for an inheritance, and raise up one from among them, in whom all nations of the earth should be blessed, is well known to us all. So that now we may thus read the words which God speaks here by *Isaiab*, and compare them, and see how they correspond with *Abraham* and his Posterity.

I have, says God, raised up the righteous *Abraham* from the east, I have called him to my foot, to follow me step by step, just as I saw good to lead him: he not knowing from time to time which way he was to travel, but depending wholly upon my direction. I gave the nations of *Palestine* before him, and made him rule in his Posterity over their Kings; whom I gave as dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. So that he pursued them with success, and passed on with safety in a way which he had never travelled before.

ALL this, I say, is very applicable to *Abraham* and his Posterity; of whom God speaks as of one man, calling the generations, as he says here, from the beginning, and leading them through Countries which they were not acquainted with; where they might have been surprized by savage beasts, or by ambuscades of those People whose lands they came to possess, had not God watched over them, and gone before them, as he did in the Wilderness, by a cloud in the day time, and by a pillar of fire in the night, directing them whither to go, and when to rest, and fighting their battels for them, whenever they came to engage with their enemies. *The Isles*, says he, *saw this, and feared, the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near and came.* The wonderful works which God wrought for *Israel* in *Egypt*, in the Red-sea, in the Wilderness, and at *Jordan*, were published by fame all over the east, and alarmed the People near whom they approached in their travels, with fearful apprehensions. But what effect had this fear upon the *Gentiles*? did it turn them from their idolatry to worship the God of *Israel*? Not generally: some few *Gibeonites* and others were converted; but the most part encouraged one another in their opposition: *they drew near and came,*



they gathered together, and by their mutual exhortations to one another, were the more confirmed and hardened in their superstitions; as hoping that the more intent and constant they were in that which they counted piety to their Gods, the better they should be defended from invading *Israel*.  
 ' They helped every one his neighbour, and every  
 ' one said to his brother, Be of good courage.  
 ' So the Carpenter encouraged the Goldsmith, and  
 ' he that smoothed with the hammer, him that  
 ' smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the so-  
 ' dering: and he fastened it with nails, that it  
 ' should not be moved.' This is spoken in great scorn and derision of Idolaters: it represents them as sweating hard about making those images, which when finished, were to be fixed in a certain place, and had no power to go before them, and help them against their enemies. It explodes the trade of image-founders and statuaries, as profitable to none but the workmen, who are glad when they have a call for such manufactures. Whereas they would work more to the purpose, more to the service of war, if they were employed in making arms for the use of living men, rather than in fashioning dead images, which have neither hands nor feet to help them.

Now this discourse was very seasonable at the time when it was delivered, when *Israel* was partly gone and partly going into captivity among idolatrous nations. It was a caveat to their conquerors, that they should not triumph upon this occasion, and sacrifice to their Idols, as if they had proved themselves superior in power and wisdom to the God of *Israel*. It was a comfortable admonition to the captives, to remember what God formerly had done for them, and thence be assured that he would fulfill all his Promises of future good things to them.

' THOU

‘THOU art my servant, O *Israel*, *Jacob* whom  
 ‘I have chosen, the seed of *Abraham* my friend,  
 ‘with whom I covenanted, to be a God to him,  
 ‘and to his children for ever. In whom I have  
 ‘taken you from the ends of the earth, from a-  
 ‘mong the chief men thereof, and said, Thou art  
 ‘my servant; I have chosen and not rejected thee.  
 ‘Fear not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed,  
 ‘for I am thy God: I will strengthen, help, up-  
 ‘hold thee with the right hand of my righteous-  
 ‘ness. All they that were enraged against thee  
 ‘shall be ashamed and confounded: they that  
 ‘strive with thee, shall be as nothing, they shall  
 ‘perish. For I the Lord thy God will hold thee  
 ‘by thy right hand, saying, Fear not, I will help  
 ‘thee. When thou shalt seem reduced to the de-  
 ‘spicable condition of a worm, trampled upon by  
 ‘every one that passeth by, and thy people few  
 ‘and forgotten, like dead men out of mind, even  
 ‘then will I redeem thee, and raise thee up again  
 ‘to invincible strength: Thou shalt be to the  
 ‘strong mountains and hills, *i. e.* to the Kings  
 ‘and Nations of the *Gentiles*, the same as a thresh-  
 ‘ing instrument is to the corn: Thou shalt beat  
 ‘them small as the dust, thou shalt bruise them  
 ‘as the chaff. Thou shalt fan them with the  
 ‘wind, the whirlwind shall scatter and disperse  
 ‘them. But thou shalt rejoice in the Lord; thou  
 ‘shalt glory in the holy One of *Israel*.’

These are professions of God’s most tender mer-  
 cies and affections towards the house of *Israel*;  
 they set forth the very yerning of his bowels to-  
 wards them; and shew, that tho’ his justice and  
 truth made it necessary for him to give them up  
 into captivity, as the punishment which was by co-  
 venant annexed to those sins which they had com-  
 mitted against him: yet he could not utterly with-  
 draw his mercy and loving-kindness from them;

he would not suffer their enemies to swallow them up, and make a full end of them. He would certainly visit and redeem them, and plant them in their own land again, even with the destruction of those that held them in bondage.

THIS God is so much concerned to imprint upon their minds, and persuade them to believe, that the Promises of it make up a great part of this and other books of the Prophets. For tho' *Isaiah* begins with such a black catalogue of *Israel's* provocations, and presents such a cup of fury which God was pouring out upon them for the same, as is enough to make the ears of those that hear him to tingle; yet if we take his book throughout, I believe we shall find in it more comfortable words of mercy than menaces of judgment.

IN the argument here before us, see how careful he is to silence all doubts and objections which might be started concerning God's power to raise his People again from the most abject forlorn condition. Who raised up the righteous *Abraham* from the east, and carried him safe through so many dangers, and settled us his children in this land against so many seeming impossibilities? This was the God of our fathers, who is still as mighty to deliver us their children: and if he promises it, he will as surely perform it. Behold he promises, saying, When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them; I the God of *Israel* will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the vallies; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springing wells. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the fittah, the myrtle, the oyle tree: I will set in the desert the firr, the pine, the box trees together.



‘together. That they may see, and know, and  
 ‘consider, and understand, that the hand of the  
 ‘Lord hath done this, and the holy One of *Is-*  
 ‘*rael* hath created it.’

THESE are delightful sayings to those that dwell in the eastern Countries, which were commonly parched with heat and thirst. I take them to be an allusion to those refreshments which God had afforded his People of old, when they came out of *Egypt*; whereby he stirs up their childrens minds to depend upon him for the like in their own necessity.

BUT II. THIS righteous man of the east here spoken of, may be, and by the best Interpreters is understood prophetically to denote our blessed Saviour, who is likewise of the lineage of *Abraham*, that branch of him which the sacred Oracles foretold should spread over all the World, under whose shadow all nations of the earth should find joy and consolation. He is undoubtedly that person promised to *Jerusalem*, ver. 27. who should bring good tidings, which is but another phrase for preaching the Gospel: to which the *Gentiles*, spoken to in my Text, are most properly and nearly concerned to listen. For to them this Preacher of righteousness was to be sent, in order to turn them from the worship of Idols, to the acknowledgment of the living God, the God of *Israel*. And the arguments of this chapter are an excellent plea for their conversion. From hence they might learn what great things God had done for one single family whom he had made choice of, to bear his name and maintain his religion. How he had revealed himself to them, and covenanted with them. How he had given them a copy of that Covenant in writing, containing the history of what he had done in and from the creation of the World, and predictions of what should

come to pass in future generations. By comparing of which things together, they might see that he is the first and the last, the almighty, faithful and true God. As he had fully demonstrated himself to be, by all his dispensations both of mercy and judgment in the government of his People. In both which respects he had made bare his arm from Heaven, and wrought innumerable miracles.

DID the enemies of his people sometimes prevail over them? The *Gentiles* might possibly think that they prevailed against God; but when by the preaching of his word they came to know the truth, they would find it quite otherwise. In his own word they would find it foretold, how he would give up his People into the hands of their enemies, when they revolted from him to Idols; and how he would restore them again, when they truly repented and returned to him. All which was fulfilled accordingly. For their strongest Alliances could not prevent their captivity, when they deserved it: nor could the arms which subdued them, detain them any longer than the time appointed by their God. When he was reconciled to them, and undertook to deliver them, nothing could stand in the way of their return. *Egypt* and *Babylon*, Gods, Kings and Princes, all powers spiritual and secular, fell before the naked captives.

TO all this, says *Isaiab*, listen ye *Gentiles*. When Jesus Christ came into the World to make the God of *Israel* known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations, he made him known chiefly, by publishing every where, what was hidden from them before, I mean the true sense of the Law and the Prophets. Those sacred books were certainly written with larger views than to a few narrow generations of men. What a light of the *Gentiles* do we see in this single Prophet *Isaiab*, which

which was but little observed at its first rising, at the time when he lived and spake the words of this Prophecy? but now shines like the Sun at noon-day. That divine Spirit which foreknows all things, inspired him to treat of such arguments as were most proper to prepare the way of the Lord, and lay the foundations of the Gospel. It was foreseen, that when the *Gentiles* should be invited to change their religion, they would ask what they should gain by such a change. The first and greatest Apostles of Christ asked the same question. To which *Isaiab*, speaking, as he often does, of the blessings and glories of Christ's Kingdom, gives a most satisfactory answer.

WE cannot doubt but the Spirits whom the *Pagans* worshipped, perswaded their votaries, that the changes which Christianity made in the world, were much to the damage of mankind. And we learn from history, that they did commonly make such objections. *Zosimus*, who wrote a compendious history of the *Roman* Emperors, to his own time, the beginning of the fifth Century, imputes the decay of their Empire to the prevalence of Christianity. He was but one of many that laid this imputation upon it; nor was the decay of the Empire only, but any other publick calamity, the subject of their imputation. This awakened the Christians to write apologies for their religion, in which they learnedly and largely vindicate it from such accusations; as may be seen in their Books, particularly in *Arnobius* a Rhetorician of *Sicca* in *Africk*, who flourished under *Diocletian*, about the year 300, and once thought Christianity detrimental to human affairs, but afterwards saw reason to change his mind and defend it. 'Look into  
' your histories, says he, and see if there have not  
' been earthquakes, wars, famines, pestilences, &c.  
' before our time. On the other hand, we have  
' now



## 410 APPENDIX.

“now had Christianity near three hundred years  
“in the World; have we had nothing but wars,  
“bad seasons, calamities, since it appeared? Your  
“annals will inform you of innumerable victories,  
“advantages of commerce, means of cheap and  
“plentiful living which we have enjoyed in that  
“time.” With much more to the same purpose.

TRUE it is, that about this time the *Roman* Empire fell into great decay; but what was the occasion of it? It was occasioned by the removal of the Imperial seat from *Rome* to *Constantinople*. And what was the cause of this removal? Why the affronts which Pagan *Rome* offered to *Constantine* the Great, then Emperor, because he was a Christian; so that he could have no satisfaction in living among them, as *Zokmus*, the most zealous patron of the old superstition, confesses.

BUT was not *Constantine* himself victorious? Yes, he has left many monuments of his victories, whereby he wrested the Empire out of the hands of several powerful competitors of the Pagan religion. And that it was given him as the reward of his embracing Christianity, appears from the sign of the Cross which was shewed him in Heaven at noon-day, and a direction which he had about it in a vision at night, that he should make a military standard, and bear that figure in it, and be sure to conquer under it: The truth of all this he declared upon oath to *Eusebius* Bishop of *Cæsarea* in *Palestine*. He obeyed, and prospered accordingly.

As to the history of the following times, no body that knows it, will pretend to deny, that of *Constantine's* three sons, among whom he divided his Empire, two went to war one with another, in which one of them came to an untimely end. But this is what we complain of, that Christian Princes too often bring those controversies to the decision  
of

of the sword, which might and should be amicably accommodated, without the effusion of Christian blood.

Whether there have been as many wars amongst Christians as Pagans, I will not venture upon the sudden to affirm. But this I will say, that if all the wars in Christendom were examined by the Gospel of Christ, I am afraid we should have much ado to justify one in a thousand. In the management of which, those Prophecies which foretell, and those Gospels which injoin unity, peace, and love, in the kingdom of Christ, are sadly violated. I wish there were other ways of ending national differences among Christians, which I am persuaded might be found out, if diligently sought after. And then, if we were only to bear arms against those who are sworn enemies to the name of Christ, we might cheerfully depend upon the Promises of God, contained in this Chapter and other parts of his Word, that he would fight our battles, and give us the victory over such enemies.

HOWEVER, these violations of christian love and charity, are no more objections against the sanctity and excellency of our religion, than other crimes of a more private nature; which are all forbidden by the Laws, and yet too commonly practised in the lives and conversations of Christians. Concerning which we must say, that God and his Christ are righteous, and we their pretended servants are disobedient and wicked.

If our religion did but prevail in the World to any degree that might be called a prevalence, without doubt many calamities of war, pestilence, famine, &c. which we often labour under, might be prevented. For these are the scourges of God, which he would never inflict, where his own Law was reasonably well observed. In that imperfect state

state which it obtains amongst us, it has from first to last very much improved our bodily welfare and outward circumstances, as might be shown by comparing our present refinements and reformati-  
 ons from the barbarity, or rather brutality of old Paganism, which was once the religion of our Country.

BUT since our Christianity, and all the publick benefits of it, are liable to vary, according to the various humours of those men who profess it, we must consider the Prophet as speaking what we might and should be, rather than what we are; and pray for those times which shall be blessed with a fulness of the felicities and glories of the kingdom of Christ; and endeavour, every one for his own particular, to hasten them, by cultivating those graces of the Spirit of Christ, which may prove to our souls like fountains of water to a thirsty soil, and replenish our barren hearts with such fruits as are substantial and comfortable to our selves, profitable to our brethren, and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ our Lord: To whom &c.



SERMON





# S E R M O N

*On the Fourth Sunday after EPIPHANY.*



ISAIAH lvii. 15.

*For thus saith the High and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place: with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

**B**EFORE I come to insist on these words, I will offer something by way of conjecture why they stand in the place and order here before us. We may observe then, that God often threatens by this Prophet, to deliver up his people into captivity, for their manifold sins and provocations committed against him, but more especially for their incorrigible idolatry, which was a most express violation of that Covenant which they had made with him. And in this Chapter he tells them that neither their Idols, nor their  
strong

strong alliances with idolatrous Kings and Nations, should be able to rescue them from this impending Judgment. *Then wentest to the King with ointment, says he, speaking to Israel under the person of an adulterous wife, thou didst encrease thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thy self even to hell.* He seems to upbraid them with sending Ambassadors and Presents to the King of Egypt, to crave his assistance against the Assyrians or Chaldeans, as hoping by his arms to be defended against their enemies, tho' they still continued in their sins. *Well, says he, when thou cryest, let thy companions deliver thee, if they can: but the wind shall carry them all away; vanity shall take them.* Or as he says elsewhere, chap. xxx. *The strength of Pharaoh shall be your shame, and your trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion.* And chap. xxxi. *The Egyptians are men and not God; and their horses flesh and not spirit: when the Lord shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth and they that are helped shall fall down together.* All this is said to assure them, that no created power should be able to prevent their going into captivity, so long as they continued in a state of alienation from their God.

BUT out of this black cloud of approaching tempest, there breaks forth a ray of Comfort, a glimpse of Salvation. For to this threatening he subjoins a gracious promise: *He that putteth his trust in me shall inherit the land, and shall possess my holy mountain.* Intimating hereby, that when their captivity had thoroughly humbled them, and brought them to see that God was the only proper object of their affiance, and to reverence, love, and serve him above all things, that then they should find a contrary turn of their affairs, a happy change for the best; they should quickly see themselves repossessed of their Jerusalem, their Zion, their Canaan,

men, and their mighty oppressors should not be able to withhold them. For that is the meaning of what immediately follows. *Cast ye up, cast ye up a prepare the way; take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people.* Which sounds like a command to Harbingers and Pioneers to clear the way and make the passage commodious for an army: But signifies more generally, that all opposition should fall before them, as in fact in happened.

To the same purpose are some other passages of our Prophet, which may properly be added here to strengthen and illustrate the Text last mentioned. As chap. xl, *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith God. Speak comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, and her iniquity is pardoned: For she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.* The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, *Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert an highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.* Again, chap. lxi. *Go through, go through the gates: prepare the way of the people: cast up, cast up the highways, gather out the stones, lift up a standard for the people. Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world: Say ye to the daughter of Sion, Behold thy salvation cometh, behold his reward is with him, and his work before him.*

THESE several expressions have all the same sense and signification: They are spiritual Raptures, wherein the Prophet speaks as if he heard proclamation making for Israel to return from Babylon and other parts of the World whither they had been scattered, into their own Country: As if he saw men at work with axes, spades and shovels, cutting up briars and brambles, levelling the roads,



roads, casting out stones, and making an easy way for the People of God to march along. Not that foreigners were to do this for *Israel* literally, but only in a figure. It was a figurative representation how all things should concur to facilitate their restoration to their ancient inheritance. This undoubtedly is the primary signification of the words. But then it is as certain that they farther import the Calling and Salvation of the spiritual *Israel* of God, as they are understood and applied by our Evangelists, and all the Fathers and Doctors of our Church. And they are most eminently fulfilled in this latter sense. For by the coming of Christ, and by the Ministry of his Apostles, the high and lofty powers of darkness were so effectually pulled down, and poor piety and virtue were so suddenly raised out of the dust into general esteem and veneration, that it could never so truly be said as then, every valley is exalted, and every mountain and hill is made low.

Now here we come to the argument of my Text, to shew that it properly belongs to the place where it stands.

FOR whereas it might be demanded, how *Israel* could be raised again from so low a condition as captivity, after their conquerors had destroyed their armies, demolished their cities and habitations, laid waste their fields and vineyards, spoiled them of their furniture, their money, their cattle, and all their substance, and reduced the poor remainder of people which had escaped the sword, under a yoke of bondage, to drudge and toil for their victorious Masters; how shall these captives be ransomed, their houses be rebuilt, their fields replanted, their cattle and substance restored?

As to these difficulties, God bids them take no thought about them, but only change their hearts and amend their lives, and trust him, the high and holy

holy One that inhabits Eternity, for the accomplishment of their promised Restoration. Let *Israel* put away their Idols which have seduced and alienated them from the true God; let them strip themselves of that pride and contumacy which hardened their hearts and stopped their ears against the divine Word; let them see how insufficient fortified cities and military forces are to give peace and safety to the wicked; let them humble themselves under the chastising hand of God, and he will exalt them in due time: For he delights to administer comforts to the afflicted, and to revivē those that are of a broken and contrite spirit.

THIS is the disposition and temper of mind which reconciles us to God, and makes us proper objects of his mercy and loving-kindness. A devout, meek, and obedient heart is the Temple wherein he most delights to dwell, as he testifies by our Prophet, chap. lxvi. saying, *The heaven is my throne; and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all these things hath mine hand made, and they all subsist by me. But to this man will I have regard, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.*

How he hath regarded such, is evident from various passages of sacred History, but more especially from the Song of the blessed Virgin Mary, wherein she celebrates the infinite condescension of the most High, that he had not despised her low estate, but magnified and exalted her above all other women, in chusing to make her the Mother of our Lord.

And how her Son our Saviour, God manifest in the flesh, hath farther honoured the low estate of life, by chusing it for his own condition upon earth, is well known to us all. In him the high and lofty one that inhabits Eternity, came down from his Throne, and dwelt with a people of a mean station and meek spirit; for with such he conversed, and to such he committed the Ministry of his Gos-

pel, and the Keys of his heavenly Kingdom. *Blessed are the poor, says he, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven: Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* What should I mention his own personal condescensions to his Disciples and others, his general precepts and admonitions to all? They make up a great part of his Gospel, and may briefly be summed up in that saying of his, *Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

THESE condescensions of our Lord are well accounted for in my Text, and proved to be consistent with all the excellencies of his divine Nature. *I, says God, who am the high and holy One that inhabit Eternity, dwell in the contrite heart and humble spirit.* By thus dwelling with men, his Majesty is not lessened, nor his Holiness defiled. It is his own rule, that things without a man cannot defile him, but only such as proceed out of his heart. And on the other hand, many things which are in high esteem among men, are an abomination to God. However a man may be dignified or distinguished in the world, tho' his person, family, and whole habitation shine with all the ornaments which silver and gold can purchase, tho' he may be attended with many admirers and worshippers; yet if he has a proud, atheistical heart, if he is more concerned for his own honour than for the glory of God, God beholds him at a great distance, he dwells not with him, he has no favour for him. Poor *Peter* the Fisherman, or *Paul* the Tent-maker, are infinitely superior to him in the courts of Heaven. They far excel him in rich and beautiful ornaments, being adorned with those graces of the holy Spirit, which shall never fade, but shine to all eternity. They are far better guarded, having the love of God, and the society of his holy Angels for their protection. By not preaching themselves but *Christ Jesus* our Lord, they have that reward, and will yet have a greater, of honour



nour which he has promised them before Angels and men: *Those that honour me, says God, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly regarded.*

**HAPPY**, thrice happy is every one who is of a meek, lowly, contrite heart; for with such God delights to dwell: His holy Spirit, throughout the inspired Writings, breathes nothing but love and favour to such men. He promises to reveal himself to them, to fill them with sound knowledge, to instruct them in his Laws: to give them riches, and honour, and life: to grant them pardon of their sins, and peace of conscience: to give them power to possess their souls in patience, when the world about them is full of tumult and disorder: to be their strength in their distress, their refuge in a storm, when the blast of the terrible ones is against them. He declares that a broken and contrite heart is the most heavenly Temple and most acceptable Sacrifice: that a meek and quiet Spirit, in God's esteem, is the most precious and beautiful ornament we can put on: that he that moderates his own passions is greater than he who subdues a fenced city: that by humility and the fear of the Lord men avoid both sins and sufferings: that the meek shall hear glad tidings, and increase their joy; that God shall plead for them, feed them, and cloath them with his salvation.

He therefore exhorts us to walk humbly with God, as the surest way to be favoured and exalted by him: that by a lowly deportment we shall most readily find access to him, and be heard in those things which we desire of him: that when we quietly submit to his will, and resign our selves to his disposal, he will bring our affairs to such an issue as shall be most beneficial to us.

He charges us, not to be wise in our own conceit, not to commend our selves, not to proclaim our own goodness, not to think of our selves more highly than we ought to think: to consider that all our endowments are the gifts of God, and to

ascribe all the glory of them to him, without arrogating any to our selves: And when we have done all those things which are commanded us, to say, *we are unprofitable servants; we have done no more than what was our duty to do.*

He warns us to take heed, that when riches encrease, we set not our heart upon them, nor put our trust in them: that when our possessions are large, our houses delightsome, our furniture sumptuous, our fare plentiful and delicate, we forget not God, and say in our heart, *My power, and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.*: that we sing not a requiem to our souls, to take our ease, eat, drink and be merry; but regard these things as the flower of the grass which passeth away; and glory in this, that we know God to be the Lord, who exerciseth loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the Earth. That in the management of our affairs, we beware of such a carriage as looks like self-sufficiency: that we say not, for instance, to-day, or to-morrow we will go to such a City, and continue so long there, and buy, and sell, and get gain: but consider that our life is in the hands of God, and say, We purpose to do this or that, with God's leave and assistance.

With respect to men, he enjoins us to be meek and gentle towards all the world; not to assume; not to stretch our selves beyond our measure; but to give all men their due, honouring and preferring others above our selves. *Put not forth thy self,* says Solomon, *in the presence of the King, and stand not in the place of great men. For it is better that it be said to thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the Prince whom thine eyes have seen.* Which is as much as to say, 'Learn to appear in publick with humility and modesty. Do not ambitiously thrust your self forward at court, or any great assembly, nor intrude into places which belong to persons of superior office and quality. For it will be much more for your honour,

if standing at a distance you be invited to come up higher, than to have a check given you for your presumption, and to be disgracefully thrust out of the presence of the Prince or great Man, to whom you had made too near an approach.

To the very same purpose is that of our blessed Lord, *Luke xiv.* *When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him: And he that bade thee and him, come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say, Friend, go up higher. Then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.* The substance of this Gospel Solomon comprehends in two short Proverbs: *For men to seek their own glory, is not glory. Therefore let another praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.*

HITHERTO I have shown you how the Spirit of God abounds in the praises and commendations of a meek, humble, and quiet mind. Now let us hear how the same Spirit blames and condemns the contrary disposition.

PRIDE is every where in Scripture represented as a sin which renders men most odious to God, and obnoxious to his fiery indignation. And great reason he hath to detest it, because it was the beginning of sin and misery both in Heaven and Earth. Insomuch that it may be justly styled their common parent: For all manner of evil hath, by learned men, been traced up to this fountain-head. *Siracides* well observes, *Ecclus. x.* *that Pride causeth men to depart from God, and turns away their heart from their maker. And that therefore he brings strange calamities on them, and overthrowes them utterly. He hath cast down the thrones of proud princes, and set up the meek in their stead. He hath plucked up the roots of proud nations, and planted*



*the lowly in their place. He hath overthrown the countries of the Heathen, and destroyed them to the foundations of the earth.*

IN the Book of *Job*, chap. xl. God claims it as a special prerogative of his divine Majesty, that *he abaseth every one that is proud*; that he brings them down to the dust, and covers their faces with confusion. *David* speaks much to the same purpose. *Solomon* reckoning up those things which are most abominable to God, sets a proud look in the first place, and he afterwards says the same of a proud heart. He declares pride to be a certain fore-runner of destruction, and a haughty spirit to prognosticate a fall. When men over-exalted with confidence and self-love, trample upon others, or overlook them with contempt, they must needs provoke the minds of the injured sufferers to watch all opportunities how they may disarm such oppressors, and tie up their hands from doing more mischief. *Verily*, says our wise Master, *a man's pride will bring him low*; his contumelious treatment of others will make him the object of their hatred and revenge; which who can withstand, when God and man consent to inflict it?

FINALLY, Pride, as a monster and pest of the world, an enemy of God and all good men, has been pursued thro' the Books of the *Old and New Testament*, by the pens of Prophets, Evangelists and Apostles, who have doomed it with many a dreadful anathema, to the infernal pit, and called out to all mankind to beware of it and avoid it. And they have shown us examples of God's vengeance upon it, not only in *Pharaoh*, *Sennacherib*, *Nebuchadnezzar*, and other blasphemous Idolaters, but likewise in his own People, the children of *Israel*, whose stiff-neck and hard heart brought many a severe scourge and heavy judgment upon them.

FOR, to note that by the way, whoever is of a perverse, untractable Spirit, whoever is obstinate in sinful courses, a contemner of good Laws, a scorner of

of the means of grace, insensible of God's mercies, incorrigible under his chastisements, impatient under his dispensations, properly comes under the denomination of a proud man. And that *Israel* were such, we learn from the general account of their behaviour and manners throughout the Law and the Prophets, and from the particular complaint which God makes of them by *Isaiab*, *All the day long I stretched forth my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people.*

**T**HIS inflexible spirit carried them headlong to destruction. It lost them the favour of God, and exposed them to the swords of their enemies, who ruled them with a rod of iron, broke their Church and State to pieces like a potter's vessel, and scattered them abroad as meer refuse and out-casts over the face of the earth. Because they were deaf to the voice of their Prophets, which plainly and constantly denounced the wrath of God against wilful men who walk in the ways of their heart, and do that which is right in their own eyes: pointing out to them the arm of the Lord of Hosts, which was made bare against every one of them that was proud and lifted up, to bring him low: that the lofty looks of man might be humbled, and the haughtiness of men be brought down; that they might come to a right understanding, and lift up their eyes to the holy One that inhabiteth Eternity; and bless, praise, and honour him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his Kingdom from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; he doth according to his own will in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him What dost thou? All his works are truth, all his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

**W**HEN the proud heart of man is so mortified and humbled as to make these acknowledgments; when

he glorifies and adores the infinite Majesty of God, who hath his dwelling so high, and yet condescends to behold the things that are in Heaven and in Earth; when in contemplation of God's immaculate Holiness and his own vileness, he abhors himself and repents in dust and ashes; when he rejoiceth that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and prays that his will and word may be fulfilled by all creatures, that every knee may bow and every tongue confess to him: This is the man whom God delights to bless, and hears his prayers, and defends him from evil: This is the humble and contrite heart which he hath promised to quicken, fortify, and revive with the graces and consolations of his holy Spirit.

LET us all earnestly labour to be endued with this meek and tractable frame of Spirit, which renders us acceptable to God, and consequently is the foundation of all our happiness. Let us endeavour, by our counsels and examples, to beget and nourish the same Spirit in our children and servants; and so much the more as we find our selves fallen into those evil days, foretold by the Apostle, *2 Tim. iii.* when those who profess the faith, and should have the humility of *Christ Jesus*, are of the most depraved nature, being self-lovers, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, covenant-breakers, calumniators, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, perfidious, headstrong, high-minded, lovers of their pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof: From such let us turn away; and follow his steps who hath said, *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly, and ye shall find rest to your souls; even Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom &c.*





# S E R M O N

On the Fifth Sunday after EPIPHANY.



ISAIAH lix. 1, 2.

*Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*

**I**N the foregoing Chapter, we find the Jews expostulating with God, that he refused to meet them and become favourable to them in the way of his own ordinances: that whereas they kept publick Fasts and days of humiliation before him, they obtained no benefit, no answer of peace from him; but the rod of his anger was still inflicted upon them, and he continued to threaten them with severer strokes of it: which they thought to be a very unkind and discouraging sort of treatment. And therefore God, to vindicate his own honour, justice, and goodness, charges *Isaiah* to go to them, and tell them very plainly, that they must look at home for the reason of their ineffectual devotions: Which lest their own partial eyes should not readily discover, he gives them a catalogue of their reigning sins. This he begins in Chapter lviii, and continues in  
this

this whence my Text is taken; wherein he assures them that God was both able and willing to be as good to them as he had been to their Ancestors, provided they would but qualifie themselves for a reconciliation, and do those things which would recommend them to his love, and deserve his regard. 'Put away your iniquities,' says he, which have made a breach and separation between you and your God, and you shall quickly find that his hand is not shortned that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear.'

WHENCE we may observe,

1<sup>st</sup>, THAT this people kept up the external modes and face of publick worship among them: as appears from their expostulation with God, that he did not hear them when they called upon him; and from the Prophet's answer, that their iniquities were such as had stopt God's ears against their Prayers. I confess this Prophet often upbraids them with idolatry: but in the catalogue of sins here recited, which obstructed the current of God's mercies from flowing upon them, that sin is not laid to their charge. We read afterwards, *Jer.* xxxvi. that a great multitude of people from all the cities of *Judah* assembled at the Temple, and kept a regular fast, as to the external rites of worship, but to as little good purpose as here, and for the same reason mentioned in my Text. However, they were thus far in the right, that they applied to God by fasting and prayer; which is certainly necessary for the obtaining any blessing from him. For though such sins as are here charged upon *Israel*, will render our petitions ineffectual; yet petition we must, or we shall never be relieved. He knows nothing of religion, who knows not that prayer in ordinary, and fasting upon extraordinary occasions, are essential parts of it. For though we should suppose that a man could discharge all the duties of

of the second Table, without doing those of the first, (which yet I absolutely deny, for he can do nothing that is good without the grace of God, and he cannot obtain this grace without the proper means) yet if this were possible, he would not be relieved in his wants without his prayers; it being God's will and ordinance that men should ask in order to receive, and seek for what they desire to find. We must indeed humbly and thankfully confess, that God gives us many more things than we are able either to ask or think: but this must not hinder us from making our daily prayers in general for all things that are needful both for our souls and bodies, and in particular for such mercies as we know to be agreeable both to the will of God and our present circumstances; for herein we glorifie God, in that we believe him to be the fountain of all goodness, and that he hears the prayers of all those who faithfully call upon him, and will be found of those who diligently seek him. But

2dly, We observe, that the exercise of religion in fasting and prayer will avail us nothing, unless our hearts be turned to the love and fear of God, and to the keeping of his commandments. This is so fully declared in Scripture, and so evident to common sense and reason, that none can mistake it for want of understanding. And yet, so perverse is the heart of man, that the main body of *Jews* and Christians have always been frustrating the design of their religion by their wicked hearts and lives.

WHAT need I stand to alledge those Scriptures which injoin the love and fear of God, and the doing of his will, when every one knows this is the end of all teaching, and the substance of the whole Law and the Prophets? Let us rather hear what censures God passes by the mouth of his Prophets upon those that draw nigh unto him  
with



with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, while their heart is far from him, and they live in the gross violation of some of his Laws. First by *Moses*, *Deut.* xxvii. 26. *Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this Law to do them.* Secondly, by *Joshua*, xxiii. 16. *When you have transgressed the Covenant of the Lord your God, then will his anger be kindled against you, and ye shall quickly perish from off the good land which he hath given you.* Thirdly, by *Samuel*, 1 *Sam.* xv. 22. *To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of Rams. For rebellion is as the sin of Witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.* Fourthly, by *David*, *Psal.* xxxiv. 15, 16. *The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the Earth.* And he glories in it as a demonstration of the integrity of his obedience, that God had graciously fulfilled his request, *Psal.* lxvi. 18, 19. *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. But verily God hath heard me, and attended to the voice of my prayer.* Fifthly, by *Solomon*, *Prov.* xv. 8. *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord; but the prayer of the upright is his delight.* Let not impious men hope to please God with their Gifts and Sacrifices, which are odious to him when presented by the hearts and hands of those who are workers of iniquity. On the contrary, the prayers of upright men, though poor and unable to make any costly offerings, are exceeding acceptable, and prevail for great blessings. And again he says, *Prov.* xxviii. 9. *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the Law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.* Whoso refuseth to hearken to God and obey his word, deceives himself if he thinks by his prayers to please him, and make amends for his crimes. For God will be so far from

from hearkning to him, that he will abominate such prayers as tend to nothing but to make him a partner with the wicked in their Sins. Sixthly, by *Isaiah*, i. 11. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices, saith the Lord? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination to me. When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: when ye make many prayers, I will not bear: your hands are full of blood.* Chap. lxvi. *He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swines blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol.* Why so? *Because, as he subjoins, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.* Oxen, Lambs, and Incense were legal Sacrifices, and acceptable to the divine Majesty, when offered with clean hands and a pure heart, by those who put away the evil of their doings, who ceased to do evil, and learned to do well. That which rendred them abominable was, the wickedness of the Sacrificer. Seventhly, When certain of the Elders of *Israel* came to the Prophet *Ezekiel*, Chap. xiv. to consult God by him concerning the success of their affairs, God's answer was, that he would give them no directions, *because they had set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face.* And indeed, to what purpose should he give them oracles and revelations, who never did any thing but their own pleasure? Even a wise man would not lose time in giving advice to those, who by experience he knew would follow their lusts and passions against all that God and man could say to the contrary. And therefore God sends home these perverse Elders of *Israel* with this admonition, 'Go and repent, and turn from your Idols and from all your abominations, and then I will hear you.'

BUT

BUT not to be too tedious, I pass over the rest of the Prophets, and come to the New Testament, where we presently see the State of the *Jews* religion in the practice of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*. They were very precise in the external forms and ceremonies of religion; but in all other things they served their own carnal lusts and interests; insomuch that our Lord affirms, that they fully answered *Isaiah's* character of the people of his time, who drew nigh to God with their lips, and departed from him in their heart. They did all their good works to gain esteem and reputation in the world; and that reputation they abused for a cloak of much wickedness. The resemblances which Christ makes of them, to whited sepulchers, barren fig-trees, cheating husbandmen, who refused to give their master the fruits of his vineyard, warrant us to conclude that they were generally destitute of real goodness.

HE teaches his own disciples another sort of righteousness, far exceeding that of these men. He tells them that it will avail them nothing to call him their Lord and Master, except they do the things which he commands them. And that he should pass a Sentence of condemnation at the last day upon many who would be thought very considerable in his Church, because in their life and conversation they would be found workers of iniquity.

AND thus much I have said in general to show, how all wilful sins and habitual trespasses of the divine Law, create a distance between us and our God, and separate us from him like a vast gulf, over which our prayers cannot be conveyed to his ear, nor will his arm reach to us to protect and deliver us. For though his hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear; yet our iniquities can effectually restrain and avert him, that he will not save nor hear us.

LET



LET us now proceed to those particular sins which are charged upon *Israel* in this Chapter, and assigned as the cause of this woful separation.

THE account of them begins with the breach of the Sixth Commandment: *Your bands*, says he, *are defiled with blood*. He says the same thing, Chap. i. 15. 'When ye spread forth your hands to offer up your prayers and supplications to me, how do you think I can endure to behold them with the crimson stains of innocent blood upon them? No, I will turn away my face with the greatest abhorrence; I will not be entreated, though you make many prayers.' He says farther, Chap. iv. that the blood of *Jerusalem* was to be purged out of the midst of her by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning. *Hosea*, who prophesied at the same time in *Israel*, complains that his country was sadly polluted with blood. *Jeremiah* in his Lamentations over the ruins of *Jerusalem*, Chap. iv. assigns this as one reason of her desolation, that the blood of the just had been shed in the midst of her; and that many of her inhabitants had so polluted themselves with blood, that their garments could not be touched. This charge might be farther made good by many like passages out of *Ezekiel* and the rest of the Prophets.

So that we have no room to doubt but, in the times of these Prophets, *Israel* and *Judah* were much infested with murderers; under which word we must comprehend, not only those who violently assaulted, and actually shed the blood of uncondemned men, but likewise such Accusers and Witnesses as falsely charged them with capital crimes, and such Judges as being conscious, or at least suspicious of the wrong, did notwithstanding pass sentence of death upon them; and finally, all such Magistrates and Governors as did not take care to see the Laws so strictly executed, that innocence might

might be protected, and guilt duly punished by them. All these the Prophets comprize under the appellation of Murderers.

Now if we consider with what strict Laws God hath guarded the life of man; as we may read *Gen. ix.* and *Numb. xxxv.* how he has charged all judges to take no commutation for the life of a murderer, but surely to put him to death; how he has declared that the blood of the murdered person defileth the land where it is shed, and cannot be expiated but by the blood of him that shed it; how he has threatned to make a terrible inquisition for such blood, where men neglect it: We must confess that murder is a sin which importunately calls for vengeance; that it makes a wide separation between God and the men who are guilty of it; that the *Jews* being so guilty as the Prophets have represented them, we cannot wonder that their cities were purged from it by the Spirit of divine judgment, and the burning of the *Chaldeans*, as *Isaiab* foretold, Chap. iv.

For the like reason they were purged a second time by the fire of the *Romans*. No man who has read the history of their wars as written by *Josephus*, but must know, that their mutual butcheries of one another, a little before the last destruction of *Jerusalem*, rendred them an abhorrence to God and men, and fully justified all the punishment which was inflicted upon them.

No doubt but the same evil Spirit possesseth these people under both visitations: For pray observe how *Isaiab* renews and aggravates the charge of violence against them in the following words of this Chapter. *Their feet, says he, run to evil; and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not, and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths; whosoever goeth therein, shall not know peace.*

2dly,

2dly, THE Prophet chargeth his people with certain breaches of the eighth Commandment, in these words, *Your fingers are defiled with iniquity, your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.* In their commerce and dealings they made a prey of a plain, simple, upright man, partly by their false weights and measures, and partly by their slight manufactures, which the Prophet compares to Spiders Webbs. Their streets and highways were so infested with robbers, that it was a difficult thing for unarmed passengers to escape their hands. Their Courts of judicature were so far from vindicating the truth, and relieving the oppressed, that sentence passed in them, not according to the merits of the cause, but according the wealth, quality, or interest of the litigants. So far were they from bringing truth to light, and making it the end of their inquiries, that they rather sought by artful and plausible colourings to disguise and obscure it. Which I take to be the reason of what is added here: *Judgment is far from us; justice doth not overtake us. We wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind: we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noon-day as in the night, we are in desolate places as dead men.*

How widely must such foul dealings remove this wretched people from their God, who is the fountain of truth and justice, and hath given men laws, and ordained Magistrates on purpose that righteousness might flourish in the earth, and weak innocence be maintained against mighty oppressors.

3dly, THE Prophet chargeth his people with breaches of the ninth and tenth Commandments, in that they bore hatred and malice in their hearts, and gave their tongues to belying and slandering.



one another. And this was grown so general, that none endeavoured to put a stop to it. *None, says he, calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity: they hatch cockatrice eggs.* As they addicted themselves to lying, and speaking evil of others, so they encouraged their children and servants to do the same. This propagated Family-quarrels; it dissolved the bonds of hospitality and friendship; it destroyed that humanity and benevolence which are absolutely needful to render society useful and comfortable. It filled all minds with disagreeable resentments. On one hand was nothing to be heard but reviling, insulting, or scoffing; on the other, nothing but complaints of such usage. Which two different characters, I understand in those words of our Prophet; *We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves:* the injurious aggressors being represented by the former, and the injured sufferers by the latter. What a picture is here of the infernal regions, and of those Furies which delight to torture others, and to hear their expressions of grief and anguish? How far is this from the nature of a long-suffering, gracious, compassionate God, and from the peace and love which reigns throughout his heavenly Kingdom?

SUCH were the *Jews* Sins in *Isaiab's* time, which alienated them from God, and provoked him to withdraw his Spirit and Presence from among them. And whereas they were apt to cast the blame upon him, as if he were much changed from what he had shown himself formerly to their forefathers: the Prophet assures them that he was still the same; as able and willing to help them now as ever, in case they were but duly qualified to receive his favours.

THIS is the objection which the enemies of true religion usually make to it: when they see the

the professors of it forsaken, as it were, of God, and given up into the hands of their Enemies, they cry out that it is in vain to serve God, and that he does not concern himself in the ordering of human affairs. Whereas they ought to see and allow a great difference between those who make a general profession of religion, and those who sincerely practise the duties of it. They should consider that there is a Covenant between God and man; whereby God stipulates to afford us the protection of a King and the love of a Parent, provided we render him on our parts the duty and obedience of Sons and Subjects. They should acquaint themselves with the will of God, as it is delivered in his own word; and diligently observe what laws he hath prescribed for our Government; what promises he hath made to our obedience; what punishments he hath threatned to our transgressions of them. They should peruse those histories of his word, which exhibit plain instances of his dispensations and uniform dealings with men according to his Covenant, and show how he hath favoured the righteous, and punished the wicked, according to their respective demerits. If those men who pretend that God is far from every one of us, and that no prayers or devotions can bring him nearer; or prevail with him to be more favourable to the righteous than to the wicked; if they would but duly weigh and consider these things, they must either change their opinion, or renounce common sense and reason.

To these men I would at present recommend most particularly the seventh Chapter of the Prophet *Zechariah*, who lived in the *Babylonian* captivity, and spoke the following words in the fourth year of King *Darius*, to the remnant of *Israel* who consulted him about fasting and prayer.

‘ Should you not hear, says he, the words which  
 ‘ the Lord hath cryed by the former Prophets,

' when *Jerusalem* was inhabited and in prosperity,  
 ' and the cities round about; saying (to your Fa-  
 ' thers) execute true judgment, and shew mercy  
 ' and compassions every man to his Brother; and  
 ' oppress not the widow nor the fatherless, the  
 ' stranger nor the poor, and let none of you  
 ' imagine evil against his Brother in your heart.  
 ' But they refused to hearken, and pulled away  
 ' the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they  
 ' should not hear. Yea they made their hearts as  
 ' an adamant, lest they should hear the Law, and  
 ' the words which the Lord of hosts had sent  
 ' in his Spirit by the former Prophets: therefore  
 ' came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts.  
 ' Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried,  
 ' and they would not hear; so they cried, and  
 ' I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts.'  
 From these words we must conclude, that if we will  
 so far indulge any wicked Lust, as to follow it con-  
 trary to the clear light and loud warnings of the  
 divine word; God will be provoked by such Lust  
 to stop his ears against our prayers, and turn away  
 his face from us, when we fall down and kneel before  
 him.

LET us not any longer deprive our selves of the  
 benefit of our prayers, nor hinder our access to the  
 throne of the divine Grace, by cherishing any root  
 of bitterness in our hearts, which may banish from  
 thence the good Spirit of God, and cause him to re-  
 move at a great distance from us. If we would seek  
 the Lord so as to find him, and call upon him so as  
 to bring him near to us, let us forsake every evil way,  
 mortifie every proud and fond conceit, purge out  
 every corrupt affection. In so turning to God, he  
 will be turned to us, he will graciously regard us, he  
 will abundantly pardon us and bless us, through the  
 Merits and Mediation of *Jesus Christ* our Lord; To  
 whom, &c.

SERMON





# S E R M O N

*On the Sixth Sunday after EPIPHANY.*



ISAIAH lxv. i.

*I am sought of them that asked not for me:  
I am found of them that sought me not: I  
said, Behold me, behold me, unto a na-  
tion that was not called by my name.*

**W**HAT this part of *Isaiah's* Vision is, upon the rejection of the *Jews*, and calling of the *Gentiles* into the Kingdom of the *Messiah*, is plain both from the Sense of these words, and from the application of them by *St. Paul*, *Rom. x. 20.* where his reading will help us out of a difficulty which occurs in the first line: For there the words run thus: *I was found of them that sought me not: I was made manifest to them that asked not after me.* Which is agreeable to the Version of the *LXX.* Whereas our Interpreters, in rendring my Text, have obscured it by too strictly adhering to the idiom of the *Hebrew* Tongue.

Now if it be demanded, who is the Speaker of these words, the context will satisfy us, that

they are spoken by God, *i. e.* by the Son of God, who was afterwards incarnate, and became the *Messiah*. And as to the occasion of them, they may be considered as the head of a discourse entirely new. However, some learned men refer them to the foregoing Chapter, as an answer to the Prayer contained therein.

IN my discourse upon that Prayer, I observed, that St. *Jerom* and several others thought it was addressed to our blessed Lord in particular; and in that view it will best cohere with this *lxv* chap. but then we must bring down the scene from *Babylon* where I had laid it, to the times of the *Messiah*, and last destruction of the *Jewish* Church and State by the *Romans*.

IT may be objected, that the speech of God in this Chapter is not a proper answer to the foregoing address, which appears in all the parts of it to be the language of a devout, humble, contrite heart, with whose sacrifices God hath declared himself to be well pleased, and hath given manifold assurances, that he will hear the prayers and pardon the sins of such supplicants.

BUT then it must be considered, that few of the *Jews*, either of the first or last captivity, were qualified to say such a prayer as this. For, as I lately observed, there are sinners of various denominations, who are excluded from the favour of reconciliation with God. And they are set forth in his own word under the characters of brutish, stupid, unthinking wretches; such as are wise in their own conceit, and do that which is right in their own eyes; such as are of a perverse, obstinate, and scornful Spirit, making a jest of the most serious things, and offending of malicious wickedness. Of such sinners as these God declares by this very Prophet, chap. *i.* that tho' they should spread out their hands to him, he will turn away his face; tho' they should  
make

make many prayers, yet he will not hear them. If such men as these were taken out of the Church, what a little flock would be left remaining? To the prayers of which flock, separated by themselves, the words of this chapter would not be a proper return; which yet were very proper to the collective body of the *Jews*, as we shall find by a particular examination of them.

THE words of my Text being the result of God's will and determination to reject the *Jews* for their disobedience, and engraft the *Gentiles* in their stead, I shall postpone the consideration of them, till I have taken a view of the several branches of *Jewish* disobedience, as represented in this chapter, beginning at the second verse.

And *ist*, GOD charges them with not profiting under the means of grace. The constant hearing of his law, and the occasional messages by his Prophets, had no good effect upon their wicked lives and conversations. *I have spread out my hands*, says he, *all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts.* Tho' God had revealed himself to them in such an extraordinary manner, yet they did not make this revelation the rule of their Faith and Practice; but were as atheistical in their principles, and as immoral in their lives, as those who had never heard of God. And tho' he was continually spreading forth his hands to them, partly as a bountiful benefactor, in showering down his blessings upon them, and working great deliverances for them; partly as a powerful Orator, to entreat and persuade them to leave their destructive courses, and come into the way of his prescribing, wherein they should find health and salvation; yet under all these endearing methods they proved a deaf, rebellious, inflexible People.



BUT we must remember that these words were spoken by the Son of God, and this will lead us to observe how he spread forth his hands to this People, in becoming like one of them, in going about to preach, to work miracles, and to do all good offices among them. In this sort he spread forth his hands to recover the lost sheep of the house of *Israel*. And finally, he spread them forth upon the Cross, that he might gather all the children of God, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, into one fold, and offer up himself a sacrifice for their sins, *that whosoever believeth in him, might not perish, but have everlasting life.*

How they respected him, while he lived among them, and what returns they made for all that he did and suffered for them, is well known to all that are acquainted with the Gospel: whence it appears that from first to last they continued to be a disobedient and gainsaying People. I speak of them as they were a Church and Nation. For otherwise he had many disciples from among them, who publicly owned him, and more who secretly believed on him; but these were but a small number in comparison of the main body, who utterly rejected and denied him.

2dly, HE chargeth them with sacrificing in gardens, and burning incense upon altars of brick; both which were contrary to their law; for that obliged them to offer all their sacrifices at *Jerusalem*; and the Altar for burning incense was to be made of Shittim wood, and to be overlaid with pure gold, and to be set before the vail, which was by the Ark of the Testimony before the Mercy-seat; and the High-Priest was to burn incense upon it every morning, as we read *Exod. xxx.*

THESE perhaps may seem to us but petty Injunctions, and the offences against them not to deserve such a severe and solemn animadversion as is here

here passed upon them. But we must consider that these Laws were enacted by the special authority of God; and the contempt of that authority is no small offence in any instance whatever. Besides, such transgressions were attended with more dangerous consequences than what we can presently see. Why was the sacrificing in groves and high places forbidden, but to keep the People from falling into schism, and other corruptions and idolatrous practices in their religion? I doubt not but in such places they often sacrificed to none other but the God of *Israel*, but then this broke their union, and made them look like idolaters, and exposed them to the danger of becoming really such; which was not easie for them to do at *Jerusalem*. I am not ignorant that the Temple it self was more than once polluted with Idols; but that could happen only in a general defection of Kings, Princes, and Priests: whereas by worshipping in groves and gardens, any city, town, or even single family might at any time become schismaticks and idolaters.

3dly, HE taxeth them with remaining among the graves, and lodging in the monuments of the dead. It may seem strange how they could do this, or why they would chuse such kind of lodgings. As to the first, we must know, that in those times and places the dead were not buried in such graves as we commonly see in our Churches and Church-yards; but in a large cave or cell hewn out of a rock, in a garden or other ground belonging to the family of the deceased: or if they had no such convenience, then in some common place of burial out of town. Instances of all this we have in holy Scripture. I need mention but one, *viz.* the Sepulchre wherein Christ was laid, which was a cave made in a rock in a garden, spacious enough to hold several living men, beside the dead corps, as we learn from the appearance of two Angels, and the

the entrance of two Apostles after Christ's resurrection. So that it was easie for those who had a mind, to lodge and remain for a long time in such monuments.

AND the reason why some men chose to lodge in such places was, that either by waking visions or dreams in their sleep, they might have communication with the souls of the departed, and by them obtain a supernatural knowledge of things. Thus *Tertullian de Anima* c. 54. writes, that the *Nasamones*, a People of *Libya*, and the *Celtae*, waited at the graves of the deceased for the discovery of their future success and fortune, or of other secret things. This was a dark and horrid way of diving for mysteries: but the curiosity which some men had of prying into their own, or their neighbours fate, and their ambition to pass in the world for cunning men, who knew every thing, reconciled them to it.

BUT I must not forget to observe that, instead of *the monuments of the dead*, the vulgar *Latin* reads, *the temples or chapels of Idols*. And this was a common practice among idolaters, to lodge all night in the Temple of that Deity, from whom they desired a necessary direction, hoping to receive it in their sleep, or otherwise. For instance, several Authors write, how sick people who had laboured under a lingering disease, would go and sleep in the Temple of *Æsculapius*, their god of physick, in order to have an effectual remedy revealed to them.

SOMETHING like this, is here charged upon the *Jews*. How extremely prone they were to imitate the Heathen in their infernal arts of Necromancy, Conjuraton, and Witchcraft, and even to offer their children to devils, for the obtaining of their assistance, we learn from their history in other places. Such practices were made capital crimes by the divine Law, which ordains, *Lev. xx. 27.*  
that



that a man or woman that hath a familiar Spirit, or that is a Wizard, shall surely be put to death; and they shall stone them with stones. Of this more at large, *Deut. xviii. 10.* *There shall not, says he, be found among you any one that useth divination, or is an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things, are an abomination to the Lord: and because of these things the Lord thy God doth drive out the nations of Canaan from before thee.*

THIS is one good reason for God's casting *Israel* out of their land: he had ejected their Predecessors for the same crimes; by whose example he gives them fair warning, that when they suffered them to grow, contrary to his will and commandment, they should be visited with the same exterminating judgment.

4thly, GOD upbraids them with eating swines flesh, and using broth of abominable things. The eating of swines flesh, which was allowed to other People, was forbidden to the *Jews* upon sundry accounts. I. Because it was disagreeable to their constitutions, and apt to fill them with gross humours and leprosies. II. 'Tis observed by one of our learned Commentators, from *2 Maccab. vi, vii.* that eating of swines flesh was a sort of test or proof which apostates gave of their renouncing the *Jewish* religion. III. He remarks, that another reason why the *Jews* so much abhorred swines flesh, was, probably, because the eating of it was a solemn rite of Lustration among the *Egyptian* Priests, who at the full Moon offered part of it in sacrifice, and eat part themselves, tho' at all other times they abhorred to touch it. *Herodot. lib. ii. c. 47.*

THE broth of abominable things, says he, denotes the superstitious practice of seething a kid in its dam's milk, with which they sprinkled the trees  
of

of their fields and gardens, to make them more fruitful. And to this sense some interpret the foregoing expression, ver. 3. of sacrificing in gardens. They understand the words of those sacrifices which were offered there, to procure plenty of fruit.

NOW this eating of swines flesh, and using this broth, being abominable to God upon the afore-said accounts, and prohibited by his Law, he had just reason to be very angry with his People, who transgressed in these points, as they are charged here, with an aggravated contempt of the divine Authority.

5thly, HE reproves them for thinking highly of themselves, and despising others. And indeed their confidence and vanity, as here represented, was very gross and extravagant. For he affirms, that they haughtily cried out to others, *Stand by thy self; come not near to me: for I am holier than thou.* Here it may be asked, To whom they commonly said this? If to the *Gentiles*, then it must be confessed, that God had sanctified *Israel* above all nations of the earth; but when they had corrupted themselves, as it is here remonstrated, with all the abominations of the Heathen, and made themselves as vile as the worst; in such circumstances to boast of their holiness was very arrogant; it was adding hypocrisy and vanity to all their other provocations.

BUT I rather think that the *Jews* used this saying to one another; *i. e.* the vitious and disorderly sort to their betters when they reprov'd them, and sought to turn them from their transgressions to the obedience of God's Laws. We know by our own experience how impatient Christians are at this day, to be reprov'd for any error, either in their religious opinions, or in their practice of moral virtue. If the reprover were as wise and holy as *Isaiab*, I am afraid he would not meet with better usage from our offenders, than that great Prophet

phet had from his People. They would bid him look at home, and be apt to recriminate so as to let him know they were as good, and as much in the right, as himself. It is the remark of a learned man upon this place, 'that hypocrites will disdainfully and malapertly thrust away those who faithfully admonish them, as being either persuaded that they are better than the admonisher, or else because their pride is so great, that it will not suffer them to acknowledge a fault. For where-ever the devil hath the ascendant over men, he always arms them with so much pride and disdain, as will serve to defend their own ways against all the arguments that can be brought to reprove them.'

THIS train of thought must needs lead us to the character of the Scribes and Pharisees, as it is drawn in the New Testament, out of whose mouth we may well imagine this saying to proceed, *Stand by thy self, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.* Of whom it is written, that they justified themselves in every thing, and quarrelled at our Lord and his Disciples for conversing with publicans and sinners. And tho' in secret they were guilty of gross impurities, yet they made a great ostentation of sanctity before men, as if few were worthy so much as to touch their garments. And this was the reason of their not eating except they washed, when they came from market; *Mark vii. 4.* lest peradventure they should there have touched some Heathen, or person who was legally unclean. Thus much holier than others did they esteem themselves; tho' all their holiness consisted in external rites and purifications; and they came very short of the inward and real sanctity of the heart. *These, says God, are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day: they are as offensive to me, as smoke is to the nose and eyes. Behold it is written*



*written before me: I will not keep silence, but will recompense them even into their bosom.* Here he alludes to the custom of Judges, who cause the informations and evidences that are brought before them, to be kept upon record, that so the conviction of offenders may appear to future times. For what we would have made known to posterity, we commit to writing. God then signifies here, that he can never forget the things before mentioned, because they stand upon record before him. For however he delays for a time, yet he will not suffer the impenitent to escape unpunished, but in the end they shall find him a just Judge. Accordingly he assures them that he will punish their iniquities, and the iniquities of their idolatrous Ancestors together: which they might justly expect, it being his way of dealing declared in the second Commandment. And so our Lord tells the men of his generation, that by filling up the measure of their fathers sins, they should bring upon themselves all the righteous blood which had been shed in their land from first to last, *Matt. xxiii.* as it afterwards came to pass.

AND thus we have seen God's reasons, as contained in this chapter, for rejecting his ancient People the *Jews*, and calling the *Gentiles* in their stead. All which our Lord has briefly comprized in that Parable, *Matt. xxi.* of the husbandmen who withheld the fruits of the vineyard from the owner of it, and killed all those whom he sent to demand them. 'How do ye think he will deal with those wicked men? Why, said his hearers, he will miserably destroy them, and let out his vineyard to others, who will render him the fruits of it in due season. Just so, says Christ, I assure you, shall the Kingdom of God be taken from you, and given to people who will bring forth the fruits of it.'

THE reason of God's calling the *Gentiles* into the Kingdom of the *Messiah*, was not any merit or worthiness in them, but his own free Grace and Goodness towards them: As he clearly expresses it in the words of my Text, saying, *I have put my self in the way of those who never enquired after me: I am found of them who sought me not.* And how he made himself known to them, appears from the first preaching of the Gospel, when he sent out his Apostles with a Commission to preach it to all nations. Which was so contrary to the general opinion of the *Jews*, that they thought their *Messiah* should only subdue the nations, and rule over them with a rod of iron, but never admit them to the same privileges with his ancient People. For many ages they were so far from entertaining the thought of such an universal Church, that they could not endure to hear of it. St. Paul, *Rom. x.* carries this *Jewish* aversion to the *Gentiles*, as high as the age of *Isaiah*; for he says the Prophet was very bold, when he declared, as he does in my Text, that Christ should manifest himself and offer his salvation to people who had never known God before, nor called upon his name. Paul had reason to call the Prophet bold for making this declaration. For when this Apostle gave an account to the *Jews* at *Jerusalem* how he was converted to Christianity, and came to that part of his apology, where the Lord appeared to him, and told him, *he would send him to preach to the Gentiles*; the whole audience lift up their voice, and said, *Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live.* So impatient were they to hear, that the *Gentiles* should be taken into covenant with God, and so incredulous that he should give any revelation or direction to that purpose.

LET us then, with this Apostle, admire the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge

ledge of God, who hath brought us into a state of salvation by unsearchable methods and ways past our finding out: and notwithstanding the envy of the *Jews*, and the ignorance of the *Gentiles*, hath caused his salvation to come out of *Sion*, and his worship from *Jerusalem*, to enlighten those who had never heard of his name, and to find out those who sought him not.

FOR it is well known that both Christ who is the author, and his Apostles and first Ministers who were the instruments of our salvation, were all of the seed of *Abraham*, and of the house of *Israel*. And therefore when we hear the Prophets speak of the rejection of the *Jews*, we must understand that they were indeed rejected from being a Church and Nation; but that a large remnant were saved, and were the means of salvation to others, is evident from the Gospels, and intimated by *Isaiah* in the chapter here before us, where he says, *Thus saith the Lord, as the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants sake, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.*

LET us take warning by their example, that we fall not by the like instances of disobedience; and let us pray that they may be converted to the acknowledgment of the truth as it is in *Jesus*, that so they together with us may be made partakers of his heavenly Kingdom, where he liveth and reigneth &c.

The End of



VOLUME.